

1. INTRODUCTION – A RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

At the *heart* of the Christian faith is a particular understanding of *God*, and the *task* of theology is to give an account of that vision under specific historical conditions. That is the challenge, burden, and privilege of theology. This research focuses on how that assignment is undertaken in contemporary Systematic Theology and proposes, in a modest manner, a specific direction for the development of a doctrine of God.

An *academic discipline* mediates the task of giving an account. What Christians believe can obviously be expressed in myriad ways such as doxologically and liturgically – that is first-order embodiment. People convey their deepest convictions in prayers, hymns, and sermons. But there is another rational, analytic, and coherent way to do this – that is the domain of intellectual disciplines – that is second-order activity. From the earliest attempts to present the truths of the Christian faith in a synthesis, starting with Origen’s *On first principles*, theologians have described their understanding of God. It is possible to write a history of this disciplinary reflection, and how the intellectual constructions have changed over time. One may even label this endeavour as “theo-epistemes”, to borrow a notion from the philosopher Foucault.¹ These descriptions or constructions display deeper dynamics; thinking about God took place according to the available patterns of knowledge that were current at the time. The elements selected for discussion and the order of presentation are all significant. This study *focuses* specifically on these elements: *What should be addressed in a Christian doctrine of God?*

The *title* of this short book – *Considering the doctrine of God: Fragments on Trinity, discourses, and time* – conveys a number of important emphases. This is no comprehensive theology of God; this is meta-reflection, an investigation into the practice of writing a doctrine about God. This is *preliminary* work, exhibiting thinking that is still in progress. It ponders construction; it is not the edifice itself. This research conveys one firm conviction: the Christian approach to God should be consistently trinitarian. In a Christian doctrine of God, the confession of *God as triune* is central. This is the ultimate symbol in the Christian faith, the one element that assigns meaning to everything else. A sense of time is critical; thinking takes place in a *historical moment* against a background of work done in the past, with a sense of the future. Speaking and writing about the Christian God is no sanitised practice, immunised from the pressures and

1 For Foucault (1970:xxii), an “episteme” refers to implicit rules that govern what is constituted as forms of legitimate knowledge for a particular period.

the influences of the present context. It is reflection in conversation with a wider community of thinkers; hence, the emphasis on *discourse*. Much of the work is mere listening and communicating to the interested reader what others have said. Systematic Theology happens in a network of fellow scholars; there is contestation, diverse opinions, and mutual enrichment.²

A work like the present one is obviously the fruit of personal interest. But there may also be a more academic *warrant*. The attentive student of Systematic Theology and of the evolving currents and trends, specifically concerning the doctrine of God, may perceive two subtle developments: it seems as if the enthusiasm for trinitarian adventures experienced since the 1970s is subsiding, and one no longer comes across major original works on God. Few contemporary work can be compared to the comprehensive and penetrating studies by Moltmann, Pannenberg, Jenson, Kasper, and Jüngel, to mention a few. One could have given the present investigation a different and more succinct title: *Speaking God after the trinitarian renaissance*. The critical word is obviously “after”. Does it signify an end and a new beginning, or the continuation after new insights have been internalised? Maybe the historical moment is too ambiguous; there is still too much contestation to suggest an answer. In light of the discussion and of newer sensibilities, what should be the path forward? The work is interested in a modest *contribution* to this question.

It may be productive to examine briefly the doctrines of God presented in *three excellent monographs on “Dogmatics”* and register some of the trends observed therein. A theo-epistemic approach is interested in *design, rubrics, foci*, as well as in *dialogues or voices*. The outstanding feature of the work by Migliore (2014) is the consistent focus on the Trinity. The biblical, historical, and constructive sections are preceded by a description of the “problem of God in modern theology”, in which challenges such as justice and feminism are mentioned. Migliore’s (2014:69) central question is: “Is it possible to retrieve and re-present the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in a contemporary idiom and in all its revolutionary significance?” He treats the divine attributes in a separate section, after the trinitarian explanations, and follows to a great extent Barth with a dialectical pairing, for example the love of God is vulnerable and yet unconquerable (2014:88). As a Calvinist, Migliore concludes his doctrine of God with the section on divine election, but he views it in strict trinitarian terms.

The Systematic Theology by *Van den Brink and Van der Kooi* (2012) is a comprehensive study with a dominant Eurocentric orientation. In

2 See the massive study of Collins (1998) on the sociology of philosophy and the central role of intellectual communities in the history of the development of ideas.

the structural design, one comes across the focus on the Trinity, which is the “*toegangspoort*” to the doctrine of God (2012:83). The treatment is informed by a thorough knowledge of contemporary discourses. Two features are conspicuous: an interaction with the monotheism of Islam and treatment of the so-called practical significance of the Trinity. This is basically interpreted as a regulative function for doing theology, by considering the various configurations of the mutual relations of the three Persons (2012:109), and not as expected in social ethical terms. The second major structural mark of the dogmatics by Van den Brink and Van der Kooi is the space given in a separate chapter to the names of God and the attributes. In this instance, one observes, again, the consistent employment of trinitarian thought: it functions as a “*ordeningsprincipe*” for the doctrine of the attributes (2012:137). The authors, however, still think in terms of an old convention of distinguishing categories for attributes, in this case those of “*transcendentie en toewyding*” (2012:137). According to them, divine attributes do give a glimpse of the being of God.

The dogmatics by *Kärkkäinen* (2019), a condensed version of his five-volume study *A constructive Christian theology for the pluralistic world*, is an impressive study. *Kärkkäinen*, a Finnish evangelical theologian in the USA, has an acute sense of the changing global world and the role of world religions. His doctrine of God is also from a trinitarian perspective. Outstanding features of this approach are a discussion of the contemporary secular world and the atheistic critique of faith in God; a novel section attending to the panentheistic relation of God to the world; a new identification of hospitality as attribute of God; an extensive attention to world religions, and a trinitarian orientation of the problematic.

The three studies by Migliore, Van den Brink and Van den Kooi, and *Kärkkäinen*, although different in many respects, do evidence how doctrines of God should be restated in light of changing scholarship and social conditions. The fundamental optic of the Trinity, and how that functions in speaking the divine, is arguably the dominant impression one gets of the approaches. There are clearly novel issues requiring attention, especially those in the work of *Kärkkäinen*.

The *proposal* of this short study centres on *four elements* that will also be the rationale for its structure. A contemporary doctrine of God should address, minimally:

- A *genealogy* of how the Christian understanding of God has developed over time and an indication of the current profile.
- A *grammar* of fundamental elements constituting an understanding of God, accounting for the *who*, *what* and *where* questions.

- An approach as to how intellectual understanding or doctrinal exposition can be integrated with a *way of life*.
- The current concern about *contextuality*, the imperative to engage with present challenges and which would include the positionality of the author him or herself.

This proposal will be argued with extensive referencing to resources in recent scholarship.

The *contribution* of this approach lies not only in the emphasis on the continued importance and centrality of the Trinity, but also in a number of *novel suggestions*: that a genealogy is indispensable for understanding the current trajectory of God reflection; that a focus of divine action (the *where* question) should be placed in the doctrine of God, and not in inferential doctrines such as providence; that spirituality and doctrine should be tied together, and that theo-construction deserves theological examination.

It is hoped that this study will elicit further interaction and that it may stimulate conversation about the way ahead of thinking God responsibly and imaginatively in our time.

The overall *form* and presentation has been intentionally designed: the work comprises twenty-five short thematic reflections and discussions, each one with recommended reading. The pithy and controlled lay-out reinforces the preliminary and fragmentary character. These are initial explorations towards a larger work. The literature recommendations are crucial; they convey the sense of being part of larger discourses.³ The selected form may serve students and seasoned theologians by introducing them to the scholarly questions and by motivating alternative interpretations of the doctrine of God.

Generating knowledge about God is understandably *self-implicating*. It betrays not only personal concerns and interests, but also personal experiences and a personal fondness for specific thinkers and texts.

3 References indicated as “recommendations” will not be listed in the Bibliography again.

2. A GENEALOGY OF THE TRIUNE GOD

2.1 Big history and multiple theo-trajectories

Usually, a sense of historical development of notions of the divine is conspicuously absent in treatments of the doctrine of God. The pattern is basically generic: there is a departure from a stable notion of God and then a discussion about trinitarianism. This has been the typical traditional approach. One can easily substantiate this claim with an overview of systematic doctrines of God, for example, of the last few decades. For one embodiment of this approach, see the comprehensive work by Horton (2011). More recent approaches realise that the split between one God and the Trinity is untenable, and that one should start right away with the triune God. This was clearly seen, for example, in the three examples referred to in the Introduction by Migliore, Van den Brink and Van der Kooi, and Kärkkäinen. But still, even in these works, there is no acknowledgement that behind trinitarianism is a vast history of evolution of notions of the divine. A theo-episteme, sensitive to the turn to history, especially since the nineteenth century, should go in another direction. The radical shifts in conceptualising the divine should be attended to. Only then could one focus on the Trinity, but even that is under construction. What is expressed, in this instance, is a sense of “big story”, of an understanding of human civilisation as old and of drastic evolutionary changes that have taken place over centuries. Excellent sources are also available in this regard.⁴ The well-known book by Armstrong, *A history of God* (1993), is an expression of what is at stake in this instance. There could obviously be different approaches as to how to capture and categorise the historical shifts. At fundamental level, one could speak of at least *six trajectories*: (i) the origin of religion and the “birth of the gods”; (ii) tribal religion and the emergence of Yahwism; (iii) the articulation of monotheism; (iv) the formulation of metaphysical substantial trinitarianism; (v) the embrace of relational trinitarianism, as well as the turn away from classical theism and (vi) the development of atheism. This proposal has its limitations; it focuses on the genealogy of the Hebraic-Christian God: its predecessors and possible future(s). A full history of the divine would have to include the gods and notions of transcendence and ultimacy in other world religions.

Such an approach would situate Systematic Theology in a larger intellectual context and express a stronger sense of *historical respectability*. An approach acknowledging “trajectories” would reveal a sense of the immense *complex interplay* between dominant patterns of conceptualisation, specific thought categories, formative material

4 See, for example, Harari (2011), Christian (2018), and Fernández-Armesto (2019).

conditions, intellectual contestations, and ultimately corresponding notions of the human self. Detailed studies would disclose how each historical period perceives the divine and what attributes are ascribed to God. It would also reveal the immense struggle to name the divine in available thought patterns, for example, from Hebraic to Hellenistic to German Idealistic to postmodern ones. Apart from historical integrity, a genealogical approach would be *heuristic*; it would avoid anachronistic mix-ups and it would assist the task for contemporary construals. In this section, trajectories three to six – from the articulation of monotheism to atheism – will be briefly mapped. The remainder of the study will explore, in consecutive chapters, some aspects of these four trajectories in greater detail. The first two trajectories – origin of the gods and of Yahwism – will not be discussed in this work, as they require sophisticated knowledge the present author is somewhat reticent to engage with at this stage.

Emergence of monotheism

The articulation of *monotheism* – the existence of one single divine reality – is widely considered a major occurrence in the history of religion. Generally, this is distinguished from “monolatry” – the worship of one God amidst the existence of others – and is associated with the *Babylonian exile*. The impact of the events is obvious in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 40-55). The crisis led to intense theological reflection. What one encounters in Deutero-Isaiah is a claim – “there is no other” – and an emphasis on the uniqueness of YHWH. The connection between monotheism and exile is fairly obvious and this major shift in God conceptualisation was based on a fundamental conviction about the power of YHWH in history. The impact on monotheism is a highly complex field of enquiry and discussion is still continuing.

Emergence of substantial trinitarianism

The next trajectory moves to the *fourth century AD*, with the formulation of the *trinitarian confession* of the divine identity, employing metaphysical categories of Greek thought available at that time. The importance of this century for the establishment of the specific Christian understanding of God can hardly be emphasised enough. At stake was the articulation that God is one in substance/nature/essence, and simultaneously differentiated as three Persons – Father, Son, and Spirit. It took the church a long time to reach a satisfactory understanding of the unity and diversity of the divine. Two specific councils – Nicaea 325 and Constantinople 381 – are crucial for the final terminology such as *homoousios* and the acceptance of the so-called “Cappadocian settlement”. For the church, *Sabellianism*, the appearances of one God in various forms, and *subordinationism*, Jesus as

unique but not of the same nature as the Father, were not acceptable. Two intellectual achievements should be specifically identified: the use of the term *homoousios* at Nicaea to name the co-substantiality of Jesus Christ with the Father, and the Cappadocian insight that being is never “bare”, but intrinsically personal and relational.

Emergence of relational trinitarianism

The next trajectory brings one to the *twentieth century*, with the articulation of the so-called *social Trinity*, which forms part of the wider movement, the “Trinitarian Renaissance”. The names of Barth and Rahner form the background to the new interest. Theologians such as Moltmann and Boff argue that God has a life of God’s own, that God’s very nature is relational, and that God is a divine community. The starting point for trinitarian reflection is the *oikonomia*, the work of God in history; the three Persons should be taken seriously, and God is affected by history. The relationship between immanent and economic Trinity and the reality of history are central in the discourse. Several interpreters find the impetus for the new interest already with Hegel and his turn to history and the quest for new categories for dynamic thinking, specifically relational ones, and the occupation with concrete history. The resistance to this re-imagining has been and continues to be intense. The effects of the Trinitarian Renaissance are fascinating: it revitalised a doctrine that many considered arcane and without any practical relevance. The social ethical implications became fairly obvious.

Emergence of atheism

The final trajectory must be placed primarily within the discipline of Continental Philosophy of Religion of the second half of the twentieth century. A constellation of ideas converged in this instance: Heidegger’s rejection of onto-theology and the ethical turn to “the face of the other” in the philosophy of Levinas. One encounters a farewell to the metaphysical God of classical theism, the so-called “omni-monster”. The (violent) historical conditions of the twentieth century and the philosophical critiques of Western metaphysics converged in postmodern philosophers of religion such as Marion, Caputo, and Kearney. The power and action of the divine has become immensely problematic; “God” should happen in the ethical encounter with the Other. Substantial or relational categories of thinking have been replaced by a dynamic one of “event”. Kearney’s notion of *atheism* aptly denotes this trajectory: it entails faith *after* atheism. The work of the Christian systematic theologian Tracy should be mentioned in this regard. He agrees with most of the emphases of these philosophers of religion; yet he has a greater appreciation for some continuity with the

Christian tradition and with trinitarianism. To name God, in a postmodern sense, as “The Impossible”, he suggests understanding God as the Incomprehensible, and the Hidden. In this trajectory, one clearly finds new categories of speaking, of a re-location of the presence of the divine, but also an explicit framing in terms of the ethical.

After this introductory and orientating section four of these trajectories will be explored chronologically in greater detail and aspects of these will be described in the ensuing sections. A full and systematic treatment of a “genealogy” of God remains a future assignment.

Recommended further reading

The recommendations cover the spectrum of ideas raised in this section: work on “big history”: an overview of human civilisation that also attends to shifting patters of thought; one major proposal on the origin of theistic ideas; a new and voluminous study on the development of Israelite religion; a comprehensive volume on contemporary trinitarian scholarship, and a work that maps post-theistic paths in the contemporary religious landscape.

EMERY, G. & LEVERING, M. (EDS)

2011. *The Oxford handbook to the Trinity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199557813.001.0001>

FERNÁNDEZ-ARMESTO, F.

2019. *Out of our minds: What we think and how we came to think it*. London: OneWorld. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520974364>

LEWIS, T.J.

2020. *The origin and character of God: Ancient Israelite religion through the lens of divinity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190072544.001.0001>

SMEDES, T.A.

2016. *God, iets of niets? De postseculiere maatschappij tussen geloof en ongeloof*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

TORREY, E.F.

2017. *Evolving brains, emerging Gods: Early humans and the origins of religion*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/torr18336>

2.2 Monotheism and trauma

How the Old Testament functions in Systematic Theology could be a research theme of immense proportions. It is an open question as to whether the developing state of scholarship is carefully addressed in an interdisciplinary manner. There are definitely abundant references to text verses, but, and this is my hunch, hardly any attention is paid to the discourses on the Old Testament as a disciplinary field. There is a definite lack of engagement with the field of History of the Religion of Israel. As a rule, there is a propensity to focus on and appreciate the theologies of the Old Testament. A historically sensitive doctrine of God cannot do without an acquaintance with Israel's faith as part of a religion with many dimensions. Typical questions about the origin and development of the conceptions of the divine belong to the discipline of History of Religion, which is undergoing its own constant disciplinary shifts and developments.⁵ This involves a theological datum (see Miller 2000a:393).⁶ I suggest that the theological implication is twofold: How novel trajectories emerge through human intellectual re-imagination, and what the shape of a mutated image of God entails. This historical knowledge is mediated through the discipline of History of Israelite Religion. These insights are eventually helpful when speaking about re-construction in our time.

The literature on the History of Israelite Religion includes a wide array of focal interests such as, for example, different forms of religion, the origin of Yahwism, the prevalence of aniconism, the issue about the feminine, specifically Asherah, and iconography. Obviously, I cannot attend to these in this purview. One aspect of the field, the *relation to the wider religious environment*, should be briefly referred to, because it may signal novel developments. In a most helpful and balanced overview, Miller (2000b:23-29) categorises this in three ways: "Yahweh out of the Gods", "The Gods in Yahweh", and "Yahweh against the Gods". The following issues are at stake in this instance: Israel was part of a polytheistic world, and a close reading of the Old Testament texts conveys that Yahweh split off from the El figure. Miller (2000b:25) points to clan religion, Amorite religion, and Canaanite religion as the "matrix" out of which Israel's God developed. At the same time, elements of other god figures such as, for example, elements of Baal were incorporated and arguably have to do with an assumption of power. There is also the

5 For a recent overview of the history of scholarship on Ancient Israelite religion, see Lewis (2020:17-47).

6 Miller (2000a:393) views this in terms of *continuity and discontinuities* – common ground with the wider religious world and differentiation from it.

definitive identity formation, by placing YHWH in opposition to the other gods, for example, the goddess figures.

The focus and interest for Christian theology would obviously be in *YHWH* as the God of Israel.⁷ *Excellent studies* are available, and one should refer to these at least. The single best volume is arguably Römer's *The invention of God* (2015). In this comprehensive study, Römer discusses the name itself, the geographical origin, the role of the Midianites, and how YHWH became the God of Israel and Judah. He covers the historical trajectories up to the articulation of monotheism. The work by Smith (2001; 2002) on the early history of YHWH and on monotheism is solid and deserves attention. A Christian doctrine of God should engage with these and tease out the implications for a historically informed view. My interest in this short section is specifically on the radical shift from monolatry to monotheism, the shift from an exclusive concentration on YHWH to the belief that there is ultimately only one deity.

The crystallisation of monotheism – the existence of one single divine reality – is widely considered a revolutionary occurrence in the history of religion. Generally, this is distinguished from *monolatry* – the worship of one God amidst a recognition of the existence of others – and the critical insight in scholarship is the conviction that the emergence should be linked to the Babylonian exile of 597/587 BCE. Albertz's (1994a; 1994b) two-volume *History of Israelite religion* is the main source consulted in this instance. Albertz is also an established scholar on the exilic period.⁸ As to the question of the age and origin of *monotheism*, Albertz opines that its development was not pre-programmed from the beginning, but that it had to be fought out in many social conflicts. He is convinced that something in the Yahwistic religion led to the formulation of the prohibition of alien gods. Albertz (1994a:62) locates this tendency in the exclusiveness intrinsic to the religion in the extraordinary combination of social and religious conditions of the Exodus group from which it emerged. Under the experiences of liberation and the extreme conditions of life in the wilderness, a personal relationship, which had a certain intrinsic exclusiveness, developed with Yahweh (1994a:175). As long as the fight was only for survival, a single religious symbol sufficed; Yahweh had only one task – to secure their survival (1994a:63). This disposition towards one god does not automatically lead

7 This seemingly innocent title has intense layers of association. In a recent thorough study, Stahl (2020) argues that this title has been neglected in academic scholarship, and that Judah took the title over from Israel after their fall as ascription for YHWH to strengthen royal support after the influx of immigrants to Jerusalem. This conveys the impression of how crucial titles were and what historical and political ideologies were connected thereto.

8 See Albertz's extensive study on the exilic period (2003).

to monolatry or monotheism. Changed social circumstances increased the possibilities for syncretism and polytheism. The fight for exclusiveness was simultaneously a fight against social and political developments. It was no coincidence that the monotheistic tendency was only realised fully during the exile. On the way towards that, Albertz points out a number of historical developments. In the Jehu revolution, the Yahweh religion showed its intolerance, for the first time, and the exclusiveness took on fanatical features. Hosea's fundamental criticism of the monarchy and his denouncement of the Yahweh cult occurred on the basis of an appeal to the relationship with Yahweh in the early period, which acquired a certain critical function. The Deuteronomic movement, with its reform slogan "hear, Israel, Yahweh, our God, Yahweh is one" (Deut. 6:4), sought to establish monolatry and mono-Yahwism in an attempt to safeguard the identity of Israel and national unity (1994a:206). With the Deutero-Isaiah group during the exile, one finds for the first time a formulation of a consistent monotheism (1994b:417). Their concern was not to ensure the sole worship of Yahweh like earlier theologians, but rather to make it possible for the people in exile to have faith in the universal historical action of their god Yahweh and to dispel anxiety (1994b:418). Albertz (1994b:418) emphasises that this was a development within Israel, without external stimuli, grounded in Yahweh's power. The argument in the judgement discourses pointed to the distinctive action of Yahweh in history. The crisis led to intense theological reflection; what one encounters in Deutero-Isaiah is a counter-narrative, and the claim is repeatedly made "there is no other" (Isa. 45: 5, 6, 14, 18, 21, 22, etc.), and the uniqueness of YHWH is emphasised (for example, Isa. 42:8, 43:10-11, 44:6, 8). The connection between monotheism and exile is fairly obvious. There remain speculative views about the *intellectual dynamics* behind Deutero-Isaiah and the eventual impact of Judean *self-construction*. Albertz's (1994b:414-426) view is exceedingly important for Deutero-Isaiah. It was produced by a group of theologians gathered around a master who came from circles of temple singers and cult prophets with nationalistic sentiments (1994b:415). The message of the text was fairly innovative, but also offensive, and was based on a fundamental conviction about the power of YHWH in history (1994b:416-418). Their re-interpretation of God tended to universalism, and to a critique of domination. The fusion of the divine and political power was dissolved (1994b:420, 424). In this instance, Albertz (1994b:421) notes "a clear transformation of traditional notions", which was also an "ongoing process of reflection" (1994b:423). The monotheism, in this instance, had two characteristics: one tendency towards universalism and another to be critical of domination (1994b:420). It is particularly significant "to point to the fact that Israel made the breakthrough to monotheism in a

situation of absolute political helplessness” (1994b:425). Smith (2001:193; see entire section 179-194) refers to a “new stage of rhetoric” found in Israelite religion. In this instance, something novel, a historical novum with extensive ramifications emerged.

The impact of the events, described in 2 Kings 24-25, on the conception and transformation of Yahwism is found in Deuteronomy 4 as post-exilic literature and then in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 40-55). Increasingly, one finds studies that describe the political, social, and psychological devastation of these events for Judah – deportations, violence against women, children and the elderly, and plundering of the temple and the city. A most fruitful shift in scholarship has been the explicit exploration of the exile in terms of trauma studies; the name of Carr (see, specifically, 2014:67-90) deserves special mention. In a recent article, Markl (2020) consolidated research and extensively linked exile, monotheism, and trauma; he refers to the “birth trauma of monotheism” (2020:2). Markl’s (2020:19) comment is pertinent: “[T]he monotheistic claims in Deutero-Isaiah are a powerful instrument of resilience against the background of Exile as cultural trauma.” New trajectories in God thinking emerge where old ones no longer capture the imagination. New ways to conceptualise the divine crystallise in desperation.

The impact on monotheism is a complex field of enquiry. The work by the Egyptologist Assmann should be acknowledged in this context. Monotheism amounted to a transformation of the world; it shaped the Western image of man, but it came at a “price” – exclusion; a certain kind of truth emerged: absolute, metaphysical and fideistic (Assmann 2010:15). One could only speculate about the *monotheistic self*: the human being who is more secure, more integrated, but also dangerously prone to certainty.

Recommended further reading

The following sources discuss the significance of the Midianite provenance for the origin of Yahwism, various proposals in contemporary scholarship on the origin of Israel’s God, the problematic nature of the term “monotheism” and its occurrence in the Old Testament text, as well as its potential impact.

BLINKINSOPP, J.

2008. The Midianite-Kenite hypothesis revisited and the origins of Judah. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33(2):131-153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089208099253>

LYNCH, M.J.

2014. Mapping monotheism: Modes of monotheistic rhetoric in the Hebrew Bible. *Vetus Testamentum* 64:47-68. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-12341141>

SCHWARTZ, R.M.

1997. *The curse of Cain: The violent legacy of monotheism*. Chicago, ILL: University of Chicago Press.

SOMMER, B.D.

2016. Monotheism. In: J. Barton (ed.), *The Hebrew Bible: A critical companion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), pp. 239-270. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400880584-012>

VAN OORSCHOT, J. & WITTE, M. (Eds)

2019. *The origins of Yahwism*. Berlin: W. de Gruyter.

2.3 Plurality and complex characterisation

An appeal to the Bible is obviously of central concern in the construction of a doctrine of God. When focusing on the Trinity, it becomes a complex undertaking, especially with reference to the Old Testament. It has become untenable in critical scholarship to “find the Trinity” in the Old Testament. Argumentation to establish some form of continuity between the Old Testament and a full-blown classical trinitarian confession has become more sophisticated.⁹ A second trend, and this applies to a more general interest in God, is to be sceptical about levelling attempts, in other words, approaching the canonical text as if there were stability and univalence to the presentation of the divine. Noll’s (2001:16) words, “the changeability in divine personality is the central motif in twentieth-century biblical scholarship”, convey a wide assumption nowadays. At stake, in this instance, is the recognition of intra-canonical *plurality* which is a major challenge to biblical scholarship, to theology in general and, specifically, to speaking God. The Bible attests to an immense variety of traditions, text types, theologies, and interests. There are various rhetorical strategies such as insensitivity, dismissal, or ingenious integration to come to terms with it. My approach is to activate an antenna for this variety and explore its implications. It is a more authentic approach to the historical conditions of origination of the biblical texts, and it also corresponds to the nature of the subject matter under consideration, namely the divine. One of the specific tasks of a theology of the Trinity is to attend to the many portrayals of YHWH in the Old Testament and to relate these specifically to the fourth-century settled trinitarian doctrine of God. The identification and formulation of this specific task *differs* from the typical discussion of “the Trinity and the Old Testament”. Conventionally, the Trinity is associated with love, the *God who is for us*. Recognition of Old Testament plurality complicates this.

9 See Huijgen’s excellent study (2017).

In this section, I will address the work of the Old Testament scholar W. Brueggemann. He is truly one of the great “God thinkers” of our time, and in his prolific output he does not shy away from difficult textual traditions and from going against the grain, sometimes fairly provocatively. Trinitarian theology that values the Old Testament should consider his work and come to terms with it in some way. In a discussion of “Brueggemann’s God”, Fretheim (1998:25) opines that one finds in his theology a Reformed restatement of the sovereignty of God with his emphasis on an unsettled and unsettling God. According to Fretheim (1998:33), Brueggemann’s remarkable range of descriptors for God such as “savage, odd, abusive, mean-spirited, wild, self-indulgent, unreliable, unstable, capricious, irascible, irrational, sulky” points to this sovereignty which admits of no qualification.

I now turn to Brueggemann’s major work, *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997).¹⁰ The reader must be explicitly aware of certain principles that are operative throughout his theology. First, he is forthright about his anti-essentialist stance. In an important footnote (1997:65, n. 11), he also mentions the problematic nature of the speech/reality relation. According to him, speech leads reality in the Old Testament, and speech constitutes reality. God is endlessly in the process of being rhetorically reconstructed. Secondly, Western modes of thinking, characterised by a refusal of ambiguity and a propensity to give universalising closure, do not convey the testimony of the Old Testament. Brueggemann’s work epitomises an attempt to retrieve and embody the typical Jewish mode of thinking: discourse is polyvalent, and no particular attempt is made to resolve contradictions. Rhetorical strategies of ambiguity, incongruity, irony, and metaphor abound, and God is characteristically “in the fray” (1997:83, 111).

Israel’s life as a theological enterprise consisted in coming to terms with YHWH as an elusive but dominating Subject. Their primary rhetorical responsibility was to try and bring YHWH, who refused exhaustible domestication, to adequate speech. Brueggemann’s proposal to employ the metaphor of *testimony* as organisation principle for an entire theology of the Old Testament is his specific contribution to this field of study. A *core testimony* deals with verbal sentences, adjectival markings, and nouns to characterise YHWH. These utterances disclose a profoundly *disjunctive rendering* of YHWH, which forms the crux of Brueggemann’s view. In the Old Testament, there is also evidence of a *counter-testimony* that struggles with YHWH’s hiddenness, ambiguity, and negativity. Israel is characteristically concerned with the *action* of YHWH, and not with

10 All references will be to this work, unless indicated otherwise.

his nature, being, or attributes. Brueggemann discusses the following in depth: the God who creates (most mature testimony), who makes promises (oddest testimony), who delivers (most revolutionary testimony), who commands (most pervasive testimony), and who leads (most intimate testimony). A second group of the core testimony pertains to the uses of adjectives that are characteristic of Israel's speech about YHWH, and they bespeak relationship and classical vocabulary (omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent) as conspicuously absent; the primary propensity is to focus on YHWH's fidelity, and not on power.

By using nouns to characterise YHWH, Israel assigns constancy and substance to YHWH. Two categories of metaphors can be distinguished in the Old Testament, namely governance and sustenance. The first group of metaphors, which identifies YHWH as judge, king, warrior, and father, pertains to the use of power (1997:233). Each of these nouns testifies to a contradiction in the very character of YHWH, a positive and negative inclination. Severity could be rational and relative to the maintenance of order, but sovereignty runs, occasionally, beyond reason at a destructive rate (1997:249). Brueggemann (1997:249) refers to "an ominous dimension to Yahweh".

Israel does not begin its speech about YHWH with some generic notion of God; YHWH provided the peculiar norms whereby "goodness" was understood (1997:144). The largest thematisation concerning God is that "YHWH is at the same time sovereign and faithful" (1997:283). The "most crucial" utterance about YHWH, the "substance" of what could be said about YHWH centres on the capacity for sovereignty and solidarity (1997:268, 271). To Brueggemann's mind, this insight confronted Israel with "a massive Holy Problem": at the core of YHWH's life is a "profound disjunction", a "profound, unresolved ambiguity" (1997:227, 268, 311). When power or sovereignty and solidarity or fidelity are in relative balance, the righteousness of YHWH – the most comprehensive category for Old Testament theology (1997:303) – can be said to resolve the tension (1997:283). *A convergence of sovereignty and compassion renders a coherent picture of YHWH's constancy and reliability* (1997:306). This balance is, however, not everywhere present. Even though fidelity is emphatically affirmed, sovereignty does not always converge with fidelity. The lack of self-restraint and an unfettered and recurring show of self-assertion constitute the problematic. Especially the noun metaphors disclose "a dimension of fierceness that tilts toward potential violence" (1997:275). Old Testament theology must reckon with this ominous aspect: "YHWH has a potential for extraordinary destructiveness" (1997:249, 275). Finally, YHWH "cares most about YHWH's own self" (1997:290).

During exile and especially by the imaginative efforts of prophets such as Hosea, Jeremiah, and the late Isaiah, one finds a new development in YHWH's own life: metaphors of relationship between husband and wife, and between parent and child transpose the theme of the covenant into a practice of pathos (1997:298f). This establishes a major rearticulation of YHWH; an upheaval in YHWH's life and character (1997:302). Despite these efforts to define YHWH by pathos, Brueggemann (1997:303) believes that "the Old Testament witnesses to a persistent tension that does not admit of resolution".

A process of cross-examination of the core testimony can be detected in the Old Testament. The discrepancy between lived reality and the core testimony occasioned questions about YHWH's reliability, fidelity, and sovereign power. Especially experiences of unbearable injustice such as the exile led to complaints. Questions such as How long? Why? Where? establish the *counter-testimony* of Israel's speech about YHWH. Similarly, the presence of *disjunction, incongruity, and dissonance* in the textual articulation of YHWH is a theological datum and necessitates a revised narrative about YHWH. Brueggemann deals with the evidence in three categories: hiddenness, ambiguity, and negativity. The tension between the core testimony and the counter-testimony belongs to the very substance and character of the Old Testament faith (1997:400). This dialectical and disputatious quality defines this faith. These textual voices move Brueggemann to conclude that YHWH could at times be abusive, contradictory, and unreliable. He even concludes that "YHWH is, on occasion, an unprincipled bully, who will coerce, manipulate, and exploit to have YHWH's own way" (1997:362), and the "counter-testimony bespeaks something profoundly unreliable about YHWH" (1997:372).

What is the impact of this faith? Brueggemann (1997:296) mentions that "One never knows whether YHWH will turn out to be a loose cannon". He is forced to admit: "Yes, the faith of Israel is not without anxiety" (1997:282), "making a relationship with Yahweh endlessly demanding and restless" (1997:227). In a seminal article, Brueggemann (1995:459) explores his vision of the presentation of God for human self-construction: pluralism invites a rethinking of the self; there could not be a one-dimensional self: "'Many selves of the self' is in partnership with the 'many-selved' God" (1995:460). As the divine self is under negotiation, so is the human self.

Brueggemann's creative and courageous view is exceedingly important for a Christian and trinitarian approach to God. His distinction of a core testimony from a counter-testimony, and his insistence that the God is not a "patron of conventional truth" (2005:26), but One who remains elusive and irascible. Interestingly, he (1995:467, n 9) remarks that his view is not

inimical to the Christian tradition, suggesting that “[t]he doctrine of the Trinity allows for great elasticity in the discernment and articulation of God”. What the pluralising in the Old Testament and God’s own pluralising character imply for a rich multifaceted trinitarian conception should be imagined. The frank acknowledgement of a variety of traditions, of a “dark side”, and of God as character in a drama are advances in scholarship that should be accounted for in a doctrine of God.

Recommended further reading

These few recommendations convey an impression of the plurality of methodological approaches, of the potential of narrativity to understanding God as “character”, and of problematic textual testimonies.

GORDON, R.P. (ED.)

2007. *The God of Israel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

JOYCE, P.M. & ROM-SHILONI, D. (ED.)

2015. *The God Ezekiel creates*. London: Bloomsbury.

MILES, J.

1996. *God: A biography*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

PATRICK, D.

1981. *The rendering of God in the Old Testament*. Philadelphia, PN: Fortress.

SEIBERT, E.A.

2009. *Disturbing divine behaviour: Troubling Old Testament images of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

2.4 Resurrection, worship and Christologies

The argument about a genealogy now moves to a *new trajectory* – the articulation of a trinitarian notion of God. As the path to an exclusivist monotheistic view was long and winding, the one towards the fourth-century settlement is equally demanding to navigate. A journey from the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth to Constantinople in 381 should be traversed. One may justifiably divide this in two movements: from the ministry and crucifixion of Jesus to the emergence of Christologies honouring his special status, such as the title *logos*, and from the post-canonical period in the second century to the fourth century. This section focuses on the historical establishing of Jesus as a figure worthy of worshipping.

As could be expected, the scholarship on this period, especially if one is interested in the notion of God, is fairly voluminous. A number of specific *research foci* can be identified that receive active attention. For example, the understanding of, and the approach to monotheism; the interpretation

of the resurrection experience and its causal link to the formulation of Christologies; the utterances of Christologies themselves, their background and significance;¹¹ the practice of worshipping Jesus; the construction of God in the New Testament texts, and the explanation for the exceptional development of Early Christianity.¹² These issues cannot be dealt with in detail within the purview of this text and how it was delimited. Attention will be paid to two New Testament scholars, namely Schnelle and Hurtado, who wrote extensively and authoritatively on these matters. Their basic interpretation of this period is indicative of contemporary scholarship and is fruitful for the unfolding of the argument.

After an extensive *Theology of the New Testament* (2009), that was structured according to four major transformations among the followers of Jesus after his death, *Schnelle* developed a major history of the New Movement of Christ Believers, entitled *The first one hundred years of Christianity* (2020). He identifies the *emergence of Christology* as the first major transformation.¹³ He is interested in the emergence of Christianity as a new independent religious movement, as distinct from Judaism. The Easter

-
- 11 Capes' (2019) chapter and Smith's (2019) article capture the contemporary state of scholarship particularly well. The figures of Bousset and Hengel loom large in the background and the question is whether the devotion to Jesus and a high Christology were initially due to a Hellenistic background or whether they were already present in the earliest Jewish communities. Intrinsically, it was disputed whether Judaism and Hellenism could be neatly compartmentalised. There is clearly a much greater appreciation of Jewish antecedents nowadays (Capes 2019:165-168). It also involves the question as to whether the Christological development happened slowly and incrementally, or momentarily. There is a third fundamental issue in recent discourse: Was monotheism at that time strict or flexible? (Smith 2019:196). A more flexible approach allows for a special (even divine) status to Jesus, without assigning a position to him equivalent to YHWH. From the mid-1990s, one perceives the formation of an "Early High Christology Club" (Capes 2019:173) that shares common convictions: the focus should be on devotional practices; the worshipping of Jesus took place post-resurrection within Jewish circles. Memory of the life of Jesus, the resurrection, and exegesis stimulated these occurrences. The debates among Hurtado, Bauckham, and Dunn and the new interest in the life of the earthly Jesus are particularly noteworthy.
- 12 See, for example, Ehrman (2018), who, interestingly, connects the "worship of the one God" to the success of Early Christianity (2018:111-116). One would have expected that an exclusionary insistence would be off-putting; it simply had the opposite effect: "It was this claim that led to the triumph of Christianity" (2018:116).
- 13 For a full discussion, see Schnelle (2009:163-192). The other *transformations* he distinguishes include the mission to the Gentiles without the precondition of circumcision, as embodied by Paul; the composition of the Gospels as response to crises, and the production of literature such as the Deutero-Pauline letters, the catholic epistles, and the Johannine literature as engagement with the wider environment. The content of this rich monograph on New Testament theology cannot be captured in a short space. One is struck by the attention to the inherent canonical *plurality*, as well

events as well as the appearances and experiences of the Resurrected One, in particular, form the foundation, “the initial force” (2020:82), of the new movement. It is important to note that the Easter event “set off a creative interpretative process” (2020:85). As a means of making sense of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, Christology was based on three realities: the pre-Easter claims of Jesus (for example, forgiveness of sins like God does); the content of his teaching (for example, God’s unlimited love), and the Easter event complex of cross, resurrection, and appearances. Schnelle (2020:87) also points out, as part of this dynamics, the experiences of the Spirit and the role of a Christological re-interpretation of Scripture. Psalm 110:1 is a key passage signifying Jesus’ dignity. The introduction of Jesus as the “founder of a new discourse” and a “new religious world” transpired in this process, and this is central to Schnelle’s reconstruction (2020:89). The notion of a crucified man as messiah was a new way of thinking – blasphemous to Jews (Deut. 21:22-23) and ridiculous to Greeks (1 Cor. 1:23). Any possibility of cultural plausibility was turned upside down. Furthermore, Jesus was elevated to a unique proximity to God (Schnelle 2020:91): the name of God was given to him (Phil. 2:9-10); he was the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4). It is noteworthy that, at the beginning of the new movement, “stood a thoroughly creative process” (Schnelle 2020:92). Schnelle (2009:192) concludes his Christological discussion with the view that, in this instance, there is “an exclusive monotheism in binitarian form”; a “God who is defined Christologically”. What makes Schnelle particularly relevant for my own line of argumentation is his attention to the role of a re-interpreted image of God. The *view of God* is at the centre of the movement and its new narrative (Schnelle 2020:467). In a world marked by growing dissatisfaction with the Graeco-Roman view, the early Christian view of God gained some attraction. There was something fascinatingly *personal* to it. This God was defined by concrete action in the person of Jesus, who was in an exceptionally intimate relation with the Father (as evidenced prominently in the Gospel of John). Secondly, the nature of this God of Jesus Christ was understood in terms of *life and love* (see Rom. 4:17 [“who gives life to the dead and calls into being the things that do not exist”] and 1 John 4:8b, 16b [“God is life”]). Schnelle (2020:473) makes a remarkable statement: “Here nothing less than a totally new image of God is introduced in intellectual history.” This redefined notion of monotheism – God understood in terms of the person of Jesus, in terms of the cross, and in terms of the resurrection and of love – contributed to the attractiveness of Early Christianity and its success (Schnelle 2020:560).

as the space accorded to various *theologies proper*, that is, presentations of God (for example, Schnelle 2009:205, 660, 752).

Hurtado's scholarship on early Christian devotional practices and Christology exemplifies truly ground-breaking research and deserves careful attention in a genealogy of a Christian God. Already with his book *One God, one Lord: Early Christian devotion and ancient Jewish monotheism* (1988), he chartered a new direction. This culminated in his seminal tome *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (2003). Hurtado's book, strikingly entitled *How on earth did Jesus become a God?* (2005), summarises crucial aspects of his work in a fairly condensed space: questions about monotheism, the centrality of experience, as well as the social and political consequences of the devotion to Jesus. Basic to Hurtado's contribution is a prioritising of devotional practices, and not ideas; for example, phenomena such as singing of hymns, prayers to Jesus, use of Jesus' name at rituals (for example, at baptism), and the common meal as the Lord's Supper (2010b:172). His assumption is that Jewish monotheism could accommodate special figures without diminishing the place of God. A typical expression of his position is found in Revelation 5:13 ("To him who sits on the throne and to *the Lamb* be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"). Hurtado's view of this is of utmost importance: it is a "unique re-shaping of monotheism", a "highly innovation in the monotheistic tradition of the time", a "'mutation' within second-temple Jewish tradition" (2010b:172, 173, 176). This involves not only some continuity with the Old Testament, but also a development. Hurtado's (2010a) later work on God in the New Testament is also particularly relevant and important, as it redresses the general neglect of this theme in New Testament scholarship. Theologising about God in the New Testament involves making inferences based on God's acts (2010a:35). The identity of God is understood in connection with Jesus, and this implies "a profoundly amended portrayal of 'God'" (2011a:38). Hurtado gives prominence to the notion of "binitarian" worship. In this later work (2010a), he assigns a larger space to the Spirit, by mentioning the "triadic shape of the God-discourse in the NT" (2010a:99). Interestingly, he emphasises that the "triadic shape" also reflects the "triangular" form of early Christian experience, which reflects fairly stable relationships among Father, Jesus, and Spirit (2010a:101). This major "reconfiguring of [the] God-discourse" had a much wider impact. In one of his last books on the distinctiveness of Early Christianity, Hurtado (2016:62-66), like Ehrman and Schnelle, points to the unique Christian view of God as a factor in the growth of the new movement.

In this instance, perspectives have not been given the same weight previously: the recognition of the impact of the resurrection on worship practices, and a sense that the reconfigured conception of God should receive due attention and be central in the narrative of Early Christianity

and in New Testament discourse. The famous lament by Dahl (1991:154) that “God [is a] neglected factor in New Testament theology” has been heeded. There are not only investigations of this theme nowadays, but also a sense of the significant novel profile that the divine assumed in light of the Jesus events.

Recommended further reading

The recommendations are discussions of the complex phenomenon of monotheism in the New Testament era, a seminal treatment of the historicity of the resurrection and its link to Christology, proposals on how Jesus’ divinity emerged, and various interpretations of God in the New Testament texts.

BAUCKHAM, R.

2008. *Jesus and the God of Israel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans.

DAS, A.A. & MATERA, F.J. (Eds)

2002. *The forgotten God: Perspectives in biblical theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

EHRMAN, B.D.

2014. *How Jesus became God: The exaltation of a Jewish preacher from Galilee*. New York: HarperOne.

STUCKENBRUCK, L.T. & NORTH, W. (Eds)

2004. *Early Jewish and Christian monotheism*. London: T. & T. Clark.

WRIGHT, N.T.

2003. *The resurrection of the Son of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

2.5 The fourth century and metaphysical trinitarianism

The Patristic scholar Anatolios makes two statements that are exceedingly relevant to my understanding of the genealogy of God:

The Trinitarian controversies of the fourth century constitute the most crucially formative period in the development of the Christian doctrine of God (2007:432)

and

My premise is that if we wish to understand trinitarian doctrine, we must observe how it came to be formulated in the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) (2011:1).

Hence, in this section, I will *focus* mainly on the fourth century and these two councils.

There is excellent *scholarship* on Patristics, or Early Christian Studies, in general. For example, the *Cambridge history of Christianity Vol 1 Origins to Constantine* (Mitchell & Young 2006), the *Oxford handbook of Early Christian studies* (Harvey & Hunter 2008), the *Routledge companion to Early Christian thought* (Bingham 2010), and the *Wiley Blackwell companion to patristics* (Parry 2015) furnish fascinating treatments of the horizon of the emergence of a historically new conception of God. Theology is placed within material contexts of concrete life in its geographical and social dimensions. People of that time emerge in their diversity with multiple religious practices. The fourth century has been studied intensively and outstanding works are available, such as the older Hanson (2005, orig. 1988) and, more recently, Behr (2004), Ayres (2004), and Anatolios (2011). Despite the advances made, critical questions remain about the various reconstructions, as ably pointed out by Coakley (2007); one issue that remains disputed is the relation between the East and the West (2007:128, 131). According to Ayres and Radde-Gallwitz (2008:873), a fundamental division between *Latin and Greek* trinitarian theology can no longer be claimed. Von Harnack's thesis about the triumph of *Hellenisation* in Early Christianity continues to be relevant, although this also has been increasingly discredited (Ayres & Radde-Gallwitz 2008:865). The interaction between biblical Christianity and its cultural and philosophical embeddedness remains a dynamic that deserves careful attention.

Some understanding of the *chronology* is inevitable for background information. McGuckin (2011:49), with a Greek orientation, refers to "five great acts of a play" *after the New Testament era*, and proceeds to identify the second-century theologians, the third-century Apologists, the genius of Origen, the fourth-century Nicene and post-Nicene reactions, and the long quieting-down aftermath. Smith (2011:110-117) divides the *fourth-century* narrative into five parts: Arius and Alexander, Council of Nicaea and its aftermath, the Anti-Macellan phase, ascendancy of the Homoians, and the endgame of Eunomians, Cappadocians, and the Council of Constantinople.

As the trinitarian developments, after the closing of the New Testament canon, are rather complex and intricate, conventionally one encounters *distillation efforts* to simplify discourses and controversies in neat rubrics. Boff (1988:43-99) submits a rather good illustration of this. He describes the erroneous ways (Modalism, Subordinationism, and Tritheism), the theologians who created the trinitarian language (Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, the Cappadocians, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas), the official

credal statements (Nicaea, Constantinople), and the key terms (substance, hypostasis, processions, begetting, spiration). This is helpful for a first orientation, but it does not convey the historical struggle, contestation, and slow emergence of a particular vision of God.

Before paying attention to the primary councils, I stipulate a number of *disparate comments* that might be pertinent to grasping something of the developments:

- During the *second century*, the notion of a *logos* theology appeared in cosmological debates. This incidentally produced the first conceptual model with explanatory power. The *logos* was considered the immanent presence of the immutable divine in the material and created order. Theologically, this could allow for combining monotheism with a confession of Jesus as the power of God.
- A note on *Latin trinitarian theology* should be raised as the narrative is so predominantly Greek. Tertullian from Carthage in North Africa is usually regarded as the font of Latin trinitarian theology and associated with coining the term “Trinitas” and for speaking of divine one-ness and differentiation as “one substance and three persons”. The patristic scholar Barnes (2011:70-75) points out some deeper currents in Latin trinitarian theology: its internal disposition was anti-monarchical, that is, anti-modalist. “Sight” plays an important role in this tradition, and the critical question is: How is the Father *seen* in the Son and the Son *seen* in the Father? A biblical passage such as John 14:9 (in relation to 14:10) is key in this instance. The typical Latin understanding is that “works indicate power”. Divine substance is noted in the works that could be performed; the basis for unity is this: common power conveys common substance. Barnes’ (2011:74) view that the language of substance was not so prominent in the fourth century is noteworthy: “The common language for describing trinitarian unity is ‘one power’”. The divinity of Jesus was argued for in this way. The form of Latin theology consisted of the following: one-ness of God is indicated by unity of works and power; distinction by causal relations; the three are always irreducible and that is indicated by the word “person”.
- The thought of *Origen of Alexandria* is widely considered as decisive for the history of trinitarian discourse.¹⁴ He continued the *logos* trajectory and developed a complex system influenced by Middle Platonism. Jesus as Word or Wisdom of God is the ontologically mediating link between the Transcendent God and creaturely beings. He is a distinct

14 For brief, but clear treatments, see McGuckin (2011:60-62) and Young (2006:463-466).

“hypostasis” (understood as single concrete being) “made” by an eternal generation from the Father. With this, Origen accomplished two things: overcoming modalism, and simultaneously opening a space for a subordinationist approach to Jesus Christ. He also declined to use the *ousia* language of God, because of its potential materialist implications. His successors accepted the ontic distinction between Father and Word and the use of “hypostasis”, but this fundamental insight was tarred by hierarchical associations. His views were taken up in two directions (McGuckin 2011:62): by Arius, who advocated the special creaturely status of Jesus, on the one hand, and by the Nicene theologians, who developed the notion that Jesus was “eternally begotten” and one with God, on the other. Some distinction and nuance are required in this instance. The issue was not whether the Son was divine, but whether he was true God, equal with the Father (see Smith 2011:118). In a world structured hierarchically, there were also *levels of divinity*.¹⁵

- The role of *hermeneutics and exegesis* cannot be stressed enough. Bates (2015:12, 175) appropriately speaks about “reading as birth” and “reading God right”. The controversies were basically a disagreement about interpreting Scriptures. Ayres (2019:439) underlines this: “The trinitarian controversies of the fourth century were exegetical.” In a fuller treatment, which cannot be undertaken in this article, this aspect warrants attention.
- The *role of councils* is increasingly studied. The striking title of MacMullen’s work, *Voting about God in Early Church councils* (2006) underlines what was at stake: God’s identity was determined in a context of debate and power relations. The operative *rationality* of this period and of the main players should be mapped. Important studies in this regard have been published on literacy, the intellect in patristic theology, the rise of Christian intellectuals, Christian discourse, and Christian *paideia*. The *intellectual quality* of the generative process is obvious and should be expressly studied. The Christian view of God was born in argumentation, in intellectual activity.

With the dawn of the important *fourth century*, a trinitarian sensibility – divine unity and triadic distinction – pervaded in the worship of the Early Church, although conceptual ambiguities remained (Anatolios 2007:431). The Egyptian elder Arius¹⁶ provoked the controversy with his strong insistence on God’s utter transcendence, and the subordinate position of

15 See also the important discussion on “Christ in a world of hierarchies” by Young (2013:374-378).

16 The scholarship on Arius is vast. The magisterial study by R. Williams (2001) should be mentioned.

the Word. As Jesus was generated/begotten by the Father, he could never be equal or co-eternal to God; at most, He could be the highest instance of creaturehood. Hence, the slogan associated with Arius: “There was once when the Son was not”. In this “framework of a graded hierarchy of transcendence”, unity between the Father and the Son was one of will, not of substance.¹⁷ “Arianism” became a label discrediting all subordinationist interpretations of Jesus’ divine status. The doctrinal disagreement and the subsequent division in the empire prompted Emperor Constantine to summon a *Council at Nicaea* (325).¹⁸ This combination of empire, church, and doctrinal formulation could be problematic; however, the precise motivation of the emperor should be clarified: it was less a matter of interest in the subject matter than a concern about the division in his empire. His interest was in the unity of religion “to ensure for himself the protection of the supreme deity” (Dünzl 2007:50). The Council’s decision and credal formulation were decisive in the history of the church and for her understanding of the divine, especially the use of the term “homo-ousios” (consubstantial, of one being with) to convey Jesus’ status.¹⁹ The Council did not generate the anticipated peace and stability; its reception was fairly conflictual. The term “homo-ousios” was ambiguous; it had materialist connotations, might allow even Sabellian interpretations, and the New Testament distinction between the Father and the Son was not adequately reflected in the creed. After Nicaea, Athanasius, who attended the Council as young deacon, increasingly played a most polemical and consequential role in defending the decision for thirty years.

The “Cappadocian Settlement”²⁰ would prove to be seminal.²¹ The Cappadocians made creative conceptual moves to steer the church to greater clarity and eventual unity. Basil insisted on the distinction between the terms “ousia” and “hypostasis”, which were previously often used as synonyms; this allowed for a supplement to the central Nicene term to enable speaking of unity and differentiation (Anatolios 2007:440). Gregory of Nazianzus, in particular, clarified the term “hypostasis” in this context (McGuckin 2011:65). It refers to the distinction of the Godhead in terms

17 In his substantial work on the fourth century, Anatolios (2011:30) employs will vs. being as structural principles to group thinkers and positions on the Trinity.

18 A recently published excellent volume of essays addresses a wide range of fascinating issues; see Kim (2021) in the recommended further reading.

19 Note the crucial part: “We believe ... and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten; that is, of the essence/substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.”

20 See Prestige (1952:233): “The Cappadocian Settlement finally fixed the statement of Trinitarian orthodoxy in the formula of one ousia and three hypostases”.

21 This will be discussed in the following chapter on Zizioulas’ interpretation of the Cappadocians.

of relationship of origin: The Father is self-existent, the Son begotten, and the Spirit spirated. Hypostasis as person conveys real distinction of God godself (Smith 2011:116). The one selfsame “ousia” is differentiated in three hypostases. “Agennêtos” discloses the order of relations in God, and not the divine essence (see Anatolios 2007:445). The *Council of Constantinople*, summoned by Emperor Theodosius in 381, brought an end to the disputes. The formula *one nature, three persons (mia ousia, treis hypostases)* would become the main way of speaking the Christian identity of God. A historical note is pertinent at this point. It was only at the Council of Chalcedon (451) that the archdeacon of the city read out a creed, assumed to be the confession of Constantinople. It is generally assumed that there was no Constantinopolitan Creed, as the Council understood itself as a continuation or restatement of Nicaea (see Anatolios 2011:26). A long process of intellectual struggle and contestation has come to an end.²² In an in-depth investigation of the terminology involved, Lienhard (1999:121) concludes that the settlement was “a gain – in clarity – but it was also a loss”. Fixed terms narrow the range of speaking about God.

The *significance* of what has taken place and accomplished in this period, following the closing of the New Testament canon up to the end of the fourth century, can hardly be gauged. The conventional maxim – God revealed godself as Father, Son, and Spirit – should obviously be understood as a historically layered process with complex dynamics. The very notion of *revelation* requires reconstruction. Theological motivations, philosophical influences, hermeneutical practices, geographical influences, as well as social and cultural realities have driven the entire process from the crucifixion to the creedal statement of Constantinople. Revelation was redefined as being historically mediated by intellectual discourse; God is disclosed in deliberation. A revolutionary *conception of the divine* crystallised. Deep structures of Christian *soteriology* have been identified – salvation is the work of the triune God and salvation means being drawn into the life of God self.²³ Finally, a certain way of thinking matured and has defined Christian theology ever since – it became a “discourse of precision” (Young 2006:468); the church developed a unique *paideia* in the Graeco-Roman world.

22 For a fascinating study of the Council, see Freeman (2008), who acknowledges the far-reaching consequences of the Council, but interprets it as the suppression of plurality and diversity.

23 For a discussion of these three implications, see Dünzl (2007:133-139).

Recommended further reading

The recommendations focus on an authoritative reading of the fourth-century, Patristic biblical exegesis, a feminist perspective on the period, a study of how the Christian emphasis on language facilitated the formation of a totalising discourse, and a detailed investigation of various aspects of the Council of Nicaea.

BARNES, M.R.

1998. The fourth century as trinitarian canon. In: L. Ayres & G. Jones (eds), *Christian origins: Theology, rhetoric and community* (London: Routledge), pp. 47-67.

BLOWERS, P.M. & MARTENS, P.W. (Eds)

2019. *The Oxford handbook of early Christian biblical interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198718390.001.0001>

BURRUS, V.

2000. *"Begotten, not made": Conceiving manhood in Late Antiquity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503618312>

CAMERON, A.

1991. *Christianity and the rhetoric of empire: The development of Christian discourse*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520915503>

KIM, Y.R. (Ed.)

2021. *The Cambridge companion to the Council of Nicaea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108613200>

2.6 Being as personal - an interpretation of the Cappadocians

Conventionally, the role of the Cappadocians²⁴ in the trinitarian controversies of the fourth century is acknowledged. The question is: What is the extent of their contribution? The Greek Orthodox theologian Zizioulas (1931-) may be a noteworthy interpreter, as he has an acute sense of the idea-historical significance that took place, but also of the doctrine of the Trinity's implication for a wider philosophical horizon. Zizioulas (1991:29) makes an astounding claim:

24 In a larger purview, one could (should!) distinguish between St Basil the Great, St Gregory of Nazianzus, and St Gregory of Nyssa, and their distinctive views. In this section, the collective would be employed.

The doctrine of the Trinity has a great deal to contribute to Man's quest for personhood, freedom and community and the world's survival.

To grasp why he could make such a statement, one should attend to his understanding of the insights generated by the Cappadocians.

One should first consider the *background* to their theology. They responded mid-fourth century to the contentious trinitarian views of Sabellianism and Eunomianism. The notion of *prosopon*, with its theatre association of mask, could create the impression of roles assumed by One God. The Cappadocians (especially Basil) countered this, by replacing *prosopon* with *hypostasis* and dissociated it from *ousia* (Zizioulas 1995:47). In this instance, one already finds a "historic revolution" (Zizioulas 1995:47), as *hypostasis* had previously been identified with substance. Now to the second challenge: Eunomius, a sophisticated Arian thinker, linked the substance of God to the idea of "unbegotten" (*agennetos*) and concluded that Jesus as being "begotten" cannot be homo-ousios with God. The Cappadocian ingenious counter-interpretation was that "unbegottenness" belongs to personhood, and not to substance (Zizioulas 1995:49). The ramifications of this move were far-reaching.

The notion of *hypostasis* (person) emerged as a distinct category in ontology. Properties are connected with personhood, thus also associations of uniqueness and irreplaceability. Simultaneously, relationality receives attention, as a person cannot be understood without that. When the implications are considered, the significance starts to crystallise. If unbegottenness is linked to the person of the Father, the cause of divine existence is not *ousia*/substance – the Father is the *arche*. The Cappadocians replaced substance with personhood, as causing principle in ontology. According to Zizioulas' (1995:54) interpretation: "What causes God to be the Person of the Father?". At the same time, freedom as part of causation emerges at this point. This runs counter to typical Greek philosophy that posited nature or substance prior to person, oneness to the many, and necessity to freedom. On account of these insights, Zizioulas (1995:52) views the Cappadocians as "revolutionary thinkers in the history of philosophy".

Zizioulas' interpretation should be teased out slightly. There is no bare essence; "personal communion lies at the heart of divine being" (Zizioulas 2008:53). The "what" of God should be approached together with the "how" question. "The 'how' question is as ontologically fundamental as the 'what' question" (Zizioulas 2008:57). One cannot talk about the being of God, without speaking simultaneously about the divine persons. Being or essence and person are co-fundamental.

The difference from *Augustine* can be referred to clarify the view of the Cappadocian: God is understood primarily as substance, and the persons as relations within the substance. Origin and unity lie with substance; with the Cappadocians, it is different: it is associated with personhood and the Father is the origin and source of unity (see Zizioulas 1991:31, notes 22-24). Zizioulas is fairly critical of the Western trinitarian tradition, especially its refusal to make the Father the originating cause. This failure resulted in an inability to deal with freedom and otherness (Zizioulas 2006:36).

One may enquire about the way in which Zizioulas interprets *ousia*. Zizioulas (1995:49) is quite reticent about this: one cannot speak “about the substance of God nothing can be said at all”. Properties (*idiomata*) belong to the Persons; about the substance; apart from saying it is one, simple and uncompounded, one is rendered silent by unknowability. He (2008:53) clearly prioritises the plurality of persons as basis for his ontology. To say that God is “love” is to refer to the three Persons and their relationships. It is interesting to note that Zizioulas is clear as to how one should deal with attributes; not as part of a general discussion of God, but expressly of the Trinity, otherwise one “demote[s] the question of which God [one is] referring to” (Zizioulas 2008:67).

Zizioulas is emphatically clear as to the implications of his interpretation of the Cappadocians; he is specifically interested in *anthropology*. Human beings have been made in the image of this trinitarian God; hence, a view of man should reflect divine personhood, and not divine nature. The focus is on person, communion, relationality, love, freedom, and particularity. *Identity* can be understood only in terms of relationality, as was also pointed out by Gregory of Nazianzus. He also raises the notion of otherness, which is prominent in contemporary thought. *Otherness* is not a mere ethical matter, but one of ontology (2006:11). The problem with Arianism was its intolerance of multiplicity in the divine being (2006:33). Zizioulas (2006:33) even refers to the “ontological ultimacy of otherness”. The perennial problem in trinitarian thought was the denial of otherness or the secondary placing after substance.

Zizioulas’ theology and interpretation received mixed *reaction*. His attitude to *ousia* is problematic; it is simply too negative, and he may be overstating the role of the Father. Wilks (1995) gives a helpful and sensitive evaluation of Zizioulas’ interpretation, questioning whether Zizioulas represents the Cappadocians fairly and whether his accents are justified, but also acknowledges that Zizioulas allows the Trinity to speak to contemporary concerns. He flatly rejects some of the critique levelled against him, for example that he succumbs to contemporary existential thought and transforms the divine persons into modern individuals

(2006:171); such a God would be “an anthropomorphic monstrosity”. At stake in Zizioulas’ interpretation may be the “surplus of meaning” in a text. His prioritising of hypostasis, relationality, freedom, and alterity associated with the Trinity may have enduring validity.

Recommended further reading

The following focus on the theology of Zizioulas, in general, specific readings of the Cappadocians, a dismissive critique of his work, and exceptional treatment of communion and otherness by Zizioulas himself.

KNIGHT, D.H. (ED.)

2007. *The theology of John Zizioulas*. London: Routledge.

MEESTERS, A.C.

2012. The Cappadocians and their trinitarian conceptions of God. *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 54(4):396-413. DOI: 10.1515/nzsth-2012-0017.

PLANTINGA, C. JR.

1986. Gregory of Nyssa and the social analogy of the Trinity. *The Thomist* 50:325-352. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.1986.0017>

TURCESCU, L.

2002. “Person” versus “individual”, and other modern misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa. *Modern Theology* 18(4):527-539. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0025.00202>

ZIZIOULAS, J.

1994. Communion and otherness. *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 38:347-361.

2.7 Twentieth-century renaissance and social trinitarianism

During the twentieth century, there was a *major shift* in dominant God thinking, with the same innovative profile as the previous ones, the emergence of exclusive monotheism and substantial trinitarianism. One witnessed an astonishing interest in the Trinity and a prolific output of reflection on the various related dimensions of trinitarian theology. Central to this so-called trinitarian renaissance is the advocacy of a social model of the Trinity and, correspondingly, an enthusiastic application of trinitarian motifs to social ethical questions. Like the previous theo-trajectories, one also finds, in this instance, a long preparation with multiple precursors, but eventually also proponents of this approach with clear views of which one can take note. The long road to theologians such as Moltmann, Boff, Lacugna, Volf, and Gunton, for example, cannot be understood without prior philosophical developments. One way to come to terms with this is

to point to the so-called “turn to relationality” (see Shults 2005:5-9). At stake, in this instance, is the notion of “category” in philosophy that has been prominent in metaphysics since Aristotle and the dominance of “substance” over against “relation”. This has been questioned by early modernist thinkers. A philosopher such as Hegel followed Kant’s privileging of relation as category. A host of scholars such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Whitehead have started to assign primacy to relationality. This turn was also reinforced by developments in natural and social sciences. Shults (2005:9) makes an interesting comment: what is noted in theology is fundamentally a “re-turn to relationality”, as it has always been in some way inherent in Christian thought.

Social trinitarianism basically embodies a shift to personalistic, dynamic, and relational modes of thinking of God. The fundamental issue is how *personhood* is interpreted (see Plantinga, Thompson & Lundberg 2010:131),²⁵ as its meaning could never be detached from prevailing conceptions in society. This was also noted in the previous section on Zizioulas’ interpretation of the Cappadocians. The typical Western and pervasive position, represented by Augustine and Thomas, has recourse to the notion of “subsistent relations” to come to terms with the personhood of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Persons are basically relations (*paternitas*, *filialio*, and *spiratio*). The basic assumption of this classical view is divine simplicity, and the primary analogy is a one-person model (Plantinga, Thompson & Lundberg 2010:132-135). An accent on simplicity tends to level trinitarian distinctions among persons; this is the reason why one also finds an Augustinian preference for psychological analogies. Social trinitarianism, as part of a process of finding an appropriate connotation of divine personhood, conceptualises the three persons as “three discrete centers of thought, will and consciousness” (Plantinga, Thompson & Lundberg 2010:137).²⁶ Analogies such as a community or society emerge in this instance. The major logical challenge for this approach is obviously the question of divine unity. Instead of positing this in the divine *ousia*/substance, or monarchically in the person of the Father, the proposal is to appeal to the ancient notion of *perichoresis*. By mutual indwelling, fellowship, and love, the Father, Son, and Spirit are the one God. This is a corrective to the autonomous understanding of personhood by a “person-in-relation” approach. John 17 looms large in the background in

25 Thompson completed a PhD on the social Trinity at Princeton (*Imitation Trinitatis: The Trinity as social model in the theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff* [1996]). His 1997 article is arguably one of the best available to understand this approach to the Trinity.

26 This issue distinguishes a social analogy from other trinitarian constructs (Thompson 1997:27, and especially 29).

this argumentation. Proponents of this view are convinced that it better clarifies the Christian vision of God, gives more adequate expression to what personhood entails, and provides a more fruitful model for Christian community and society than the typical Western view (see Plantinga, Thompson & Lundberg 2010:143). Thompson (1997:40) is explicit on this insight: “A social analogy better clarifies for us our fundamental *vision* of God.” What transpires in this instance is the emphatic preference for a specific point of departure: the biblical, salvific history of the Father, Son, and Spirit; thus the *oikonomia*. This steers us towards a social understanding. Concomitantly, its obvious ethical thrust may also be the chief impulse to the renewal and enthusiasm of the Trinity.

Moltmann’s work became particularly associated with the label “social Trinity”. *History* is a dominant motif in his theology overall, but at the same time one finds a strong eschatological orientation in his thought from his early epoch-making work *Theology of hope* (1967). This eschatological history is essentially the history of God. Already in his theology of the cross (*The crucified God* [1974]), one sees that the death of the Son is an intra-trinitarian event, and that the triune God is not immutable. God’s action in the world has a retroactive effect on God’s relationship to Godself; “the cross puts its impress on the inner life of the triune God” (Moltmann 1981:161). In his mature trinitarian theology (specifically *The Trinity and the kingdom of God* [1981]), his *starting point* is the history of Jesus the Son and the fellowship of the three divine Persons. This is different from the dominant Western tradition that begins with the unity. The subsequent theological task to be completed is to argue for the unity of God. Moltmann (1981:177; 2000b) does this with an appeal to the notion of *perichoresis*. He finds the typical traditional attempts to argue substantially or monarchically unacceptable. One should note that Moltmann’s understanding is different from Zizioulas’, as he balances nature and person: “The trinitarian Persons *subsist* in the common divine nature; they *exist* in their relations to one another” (1981:173; the entire section 171-178 is crucial). Because of their mutual love, the Persons exist totally in the other. This dynamic moves beyond personhood, relationality – something “takes place in the Trinity itself”; hence, the reference to the “history of God” (1981:174). Interestingly, the heading to the entire section is also called “The life of the Trinity”. A prominent feature of his view is to emphasise the “openness” of the Trinity²⁷ – that is, God invites people into the divine fellowship. Subsequently, space plays a prominent place in his

27 An astute interpreter of the major trinitarian thinkers, Grenz (2004:82) considers this “the most significant aspect” of Moltmann’s trinitarian theology.

thought (see, for example, Moltmann 2000:318). The particular quality of the social life of God has *political implications* –

the Trinity corresponds to a community in which people are defined through their relations with one another and in their significance for one another (Moltmann 1981:198; see the entire critical section 191-200);

hence, the human community must “mirror” the triune God (Moltmann 1983:53). Moltmann has an intricate position on the political significance of the Trinity. He places this in the broad frame of “freedom” – “The doctrine of the Trinity must be developed as the true theological doctrine of freedom” (1981:192). For this to be achieved, one must overcome unqualified monotheism and monarchism by perichoresis – the sociality of the divine Persons. The combination of the dismissal of substantial categories, the strong emphasis on divine persons and divine sociality, the focus on perichoresis, and the insistence on political implications render this Trinitarian approach an exceptional social interpretation.

The social model of the Trinity addresses *two fundamental realities* that should be acknowledged as belonging inherently to constructing a doctrine of God: an awareness of a changing intellectual landscape and a need to relate theological construals to social dilemmas. It was born from this double sense of responsibility. The recourse to a social approach came surprisingly naturally; the fellowship of three distinct realities, so it seems, requires a social interpretation. Furthermore, because one deals with an ultimate horizon, the application to social exigencies is also easy and obvious. The theological problem is that classical Western trinitarianism did not exhibit the potential for these twofold reflexes. Boff’s (1988) monograph is arguably the best example that embodies this clearly. He (1988:111-122, 123-154) discusses explicitly the Trinity “in a changed cultural situation”, and the Trinity “as basis for social and integral liberation”. In the next chapter, I will describe the resistance to a social model. Two arguments in support of such an approach may be noted. The notion of *person*, despite its complex history of interpretation, continues to denote particularity and uniqueness that is ecstatic and relational in a way that no other term can do (see Godzieba 2011:187-190). It has displayed a surplus of meaning that has been fruitfully explored, especially in light of the turn to relationality. Secondly, *relationality* has been part of the grammar of trinitarian language from the beginning, but it has acquired a certain pregnant relevance in the twentieth century that was unprecedented. An interpreter such as Cunningham (2003:191) links this directly with postmodernity and the proclivity for difference that was built into trinitarian theology. He, however, views the relationship between Trinity

and postmodernity as dialectic; the trinitarian rhetoric issues a powerful critique: it “sets forth a narrative of peaceful, superabundant donation” (Cunningham 2003:197). To the notion of relationality, the discourse on the Trinity brought gifts of association unheard of previously.²⁸

Recommended further reading

The recommendations include an article by Moltmann, in which he summarises his own view. Two articles discuss specifically Moltmann’s trinitarian view, and one investigates the widespread use of perichoresis. The last recommendation is an exchange on two major approaches to the Trinity – the classical vs the relational.

MCDUGALL, J.A.

2003. The return of trinitarian praxis? Moltmann on the Trinity and the Christian life. *The Journal of Religion* 83(2):177-203. <https://doi.org/10.1086/491276>

MOLTMANN, J.

2000. Perichoresis: An old magic word for a new trinitarian theology. In: M.D. Meeks (ed.), *Trinity, community, and power* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books), pp. 111-125.

OTTO, R.E.

2001. The use and abuse of perichoresis in recent theology. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54(3):366-384. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600051656>

ROSSI-KEEN, D.E.

2008. Jürgen Moltmann’s doctrine of God: The Trinity beyond metaphysics. *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 37(3-4):447-463. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000842980803700304>

SEXTON, J.S. (EDS)

2014. *Two views on the doctrine of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

2.8 Critical responses. End of the trinitarian renaissance?

These theological developments provoked an interesting reception. The new appreciation of the Trinity as unique Christian understanding of God has been widely registered and viewed as constructive. Some dissenting voices should, however, not be ignored. Scholars such as Kilby, Holmes, and Tanner articulated explicit critiques of social trinitarianism and its concomitant political applications.²⁹ As they are respected theologians, their views cannot be dismissed.

28 This will be described in later chapters.

29 The list of theologians issuing critical voices is much longer. One can easily add names. One esteemed Patristic scholar, Ayres, should be mentioned for one contribution by him (2010).

In an often-quoted article, Kilby (2000) points out that the chief strategy by theologians who try to revive the doctrine of the Trinity is to advocate a social analogy. In this process, three movements take place: the term “person” is reinterpreted along communitarian lines; preference is given to the Cappadocian Fathers, and perichoresis is invoked to account for divine unity. The main thrust of her unease is summarised with the accusation of projection:

[M]uch of the detail is derived from either the individual author’s or the larger society’s latest ideals of how human beings should live in community (2000:441).

What is projected unto God is immediately reflected back onto the world. She believes that thinking about the Trinity was derailed, once the question of its relevance was raised. The moment Kilby starts to delineate her alternative to the project of social trinitarianism, one senses how problematic her own position is. She (2000:443) relegates trinitarian propositions to second-order reflection and continues: “[O]ne should renounce the very idea that the point of the doctrine is to give insight into God.” She thus distances herself from the insight that the confession of the Trinity is the fundamental Christian identification of God. In later contributions, she (2010; 2014) emphasises an apophatic approach and tries to explain what the political implication might imply.

Holmes (2009:81), a scholar well acquainted with contemporary trinitarian discourse, acknowledges the usefulness of the doctrine, stating that it has been “extraordinarily generative for ecclesial, social and political practice”, but continues to critique the contemporary trend to explore the practical significance of the doctrine. He advances three arguments. First, the ethical usefulness is overstated, according to him, and the political utility can only be achieved by some “massaging” of the doctrine (2009:84). Secondly, contemporary social trinitarianism deviates from the original Cappadocian Fathers. It is important to note, in this instance, that Holmes accepts only one form of distinction between the divine hypostases, that is, relations of origin. He dismisses any further qualification, for example, that these relationships could be relations of mutual love (2009:85). Thirdly, he questions the Biblical basis of social trinitarianism. Again, his own position is noteworthy: the heart of the biblical witness is monotheism, and then he adds astoundingly that this emphasis is “supplemented by a brief coda or appendix suggesting that this One God is in fact triune” (2009:87). His alternative is Christology: What social trinitarianism tries to address with the doctrine of the Trinity, the Father did with reference to Christology. In a recent monograph, Holmes (2012b) argues that twentieth-century

theology deviates substantially from Patristic, Medieval and Reformational accounts. To dismiss some of the major theologians such as Barth, Rahner, Zizioulas, Pannenberg, Moltmann, Jenson, Boff, Volf, and Plantinga in this manner is indeed a brave intellectual feat. The doctrinal culprit was Hegel, who located the fundamental distinction in reality in the Father-Son relation, and not in the God-world relation. Modern theologians have consistently followed Hegel in this regard (Holmes 2012b:186). It is not possible to engage fully with Holmes' position. In his theology, divine simplicity functions so strongly that the distinctions among the three divine persons, manifest in the history of the divine economy, are eclipsed when one ventures to state something of the divine immanent identity. Finally, the question concerning the political and the divine disappears totally in his polemical approach.

The quality of Tanner's argument, resisting social trinitarianism, requires careful attention. In several works (2004; 2012), she articulated her rejection of this trend in theology. She points out that the preference for a social analogy for the Trinity is a particular modern development, starting in the late nineteenth century. Her dismissal is based on two perspectives. Tanner believes that the progressive political potential of the Trinity has been overestimated. The Trinity could be interpreted differently; especially the traditional order of the persons (*taxes*), and the language of Father/Son could support hierarchical relations and sexism. Trinitarianism could be as dangerous as monotheism. She accuses proponents of social trinitarianism of modifying the problematic features inherent in the doctrine. The second major problem she addresses is the fundamental difference between God and human beings. The nature of divine relationality is different from that of creatures: "Divine persons ... seem much more relational than human beings."; human character is not in the same intimate way bound up with relations (2012:379). The movement from God to humanity is the crucial issue to address. Her own strategy and alternative is to give preference to *participation*³⁰ and *Christology*. According to Tanner (2004:328), the economic Trinity closes the gap by incorporating human beings within it. Human beings are "swept up" into the Trinity; they should not "become like" (2012:383) the triune God. Hope for the radical renewal of the human condition lies with this incorporation and not with imitation. She continues

30 For a thorough discussion of "participation", see Cunningham (1998a:7-25), who has a sophisticated view and cannot easily be enlisted by the minimalists. His notion strictly aims at countering "any attempt to understand them (i.e., the three divine persons) as independent existences" (1998a:10). He wants to overcome any trace of Western hyper individualism. He continues, and this makes his view unique: "[W]e are called to live lives of mutual participation" (1998a:13).

to argue that Jesus' own life towards other people is the example to be followed. Despite the persuasive power of her argument, at least two comments could be made. The manner in which Tanner deals with divine relationality borders on sheer reification; speaking about the Trinity presupposes a strong sense of the metaphoric quality of all God talk. Mimesis need not require the direct correspondence. She does not argue properly why participation is necessarily political. A clear shift of category takes place. She emphasises soteriology, whereas social trinitarians argue for a social ethic.³¹

Van den Brink (2014) responded comprehensively to the charges of the critics of social trinitarianism and persuasively rebutted the main objections. His reading of the resurgence is also noteworthy: he connects the renewed interest in the Trinity primarily to the social approach (2014:332). Four outstanding insights distinguish this interpretation from previous ones (2014:336): the focus on a three-personal God, a relational ontology, a historical orientation, and an emphasis on the practical relevance. Van den Brink's critical treatment considers the problems identified by Holmes and Kilby which he then dismisses with strong counter-arguments. The accusation of lack of unanimity and of *projection* is quixotic, as it could be levelled against any theological position. The alleged misreading of *the Fathers* does not undo the social trinitarians' commitment to basic Nicene Christianity (three hypostases and one ousia) (2014:341). The prominence of the distinctive Persons in the *oikonomia* and the flexible notion of second-temple monotheism lend social trinitarianism a strong *biblical basis*. Statements about the immanent Trinity, which the naysayers consider to be mere second-order perspectives, could be argued in light of the Rahner axiom (identity between economic and immanent Trinity). In response to the conventional allegation of tritheism, it is interesting to note that Van den Brink shows that social trinitarians employ the notion of "person" to critique individualist understandings; a trinitarian theology generates its own conception of personhood (2014:347). Having addressed the typical problems raised against social trinitarianism, Van den Brink argues for a continued appreciation thereof, in light of its biblical foundation, the truth of revelation (what God discloses in the economy is true about Godself), and the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity (2014:349). The very understanding of salvation corresponds fittingly to a relational approach, as believers participate in the life of the triune God.

31 In a recent contribution to the debate, Irvin (2011:402) gives the impression that he unproblematically combines both motifs and approaches; see, for example, his statement: "[T]he more closely one enters into the Trinitarian life of communion with God through Christ in the Spirit, the more one's life can be expected to reflect these divine attributes."

Van den Brink (2014:332) is genuinely concerned that the critique and dismissal of a social understanding

will lead us back to the situation in which the doctrine of the Trinity as just an inutile piece of speculative thinking, safely stored in a far-away barn of the theological tradition.

It is unavoidable to raise the question as to whether the trinitarian enthusiasm has exhausted itself, and whether the renaissance is morphing into something different. Some years ago, Peterson (2016:12) asked whether “the current fecundity could be symptomatic of the doctrine of the Trinity’s ill-health”. Tonstad (2016:1) put it bluntly in the same year: “Trinitarian theology has lost its way.” A few years later, Harvey (2018:6) warned that the backlash has gained so much momentum that the “entire project is in danger of becoming a footnote, bracketed in time and no longer worthy of investment”. Barrett (2021) recently advocated an “unmanipulated” approach. Historical conditions are changing, and a new and younger generation of scholars are emerging with novel antennas and interests. There have been maximalists and minimalists, and this divide will likely continue.

Recommended further reading

The recommendations focus on various positions on social trinitarianism, a discussion of one specific question – that of simplicity – and an evaluation of possible contributions made by theologians of the trinitarian renaissance.

DOLEZAL, J.E.

2014. Trinity, simplicity, and the status of God’s personal relations. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16(1):79-98. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12016>

HASKER, W.

2010. Objections to social trinitarianism. *Religious Studies* 46:421-439. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412510000107>

MOSSER, C.

2009. Fully social trinitarianism. In: T. McCall & M.C. Rae (eds), *Philosophical and theological essays on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 131-150. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199216215.003.0008>

PLANTINGA, C. JR

1989. Social Trinity and tritheism. In: R.J. Feenstra & C. Plantinga jr., *Trinity, incarnation, and atonement* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), pp. 21-47.

VENTER, R.

2019. Taking stock of the trinitarian renaissance: What have we learnt? *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1), a5407. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5407>.

2.9 Philosophy of religion - God after onto-theology

A final and current trajectory in a proposed theo-genealogy concerns the relationship between Theology and Philosophy of Religion. A vigorous discourse since the second half of the previous century in continental circles among philosophers holds particularly challenging resources for thinking about the Christian God. This interaction between Theology and Philosophy of Religion, which Gunton (1996:306) aptly labels “indispensable opponent and conversation partner”, does not consistently receive its due attention. This section briefly maps the horizon, and the next two sections deal with one major philosopher of religion, R. Kearney, and with a prominent theologian, D. Tracy, respectively. Tracy has taken this discourse with utter seriousness.

A productive place to start may be the influential article by Janicaud (2001) on the “theological turn” in French phenomenological philosophy. He accuses well-known thinkers such as Levinas, Henry, and Marion of allowing theology to compromise phenomenology, by leaving room for the god question. He resisted this imperialism, as theology’s focus on God and phenomenology’s focus on intentional consciousness make for two separate disciplines. The reception of Janicaud’s claim has continued and, after thirty years, the controversy remains unabated. In a recent evaluation, Bowen and Simmons (2022:2) identify three attitudes: those who think that Janicaud was right, those who reject his position, and those who consider him partially right – the pluralists who deem the two disciplines to be distinct but advocate a discursive interaction.³² It is critical to identify the *background* to this discourse: the influence of Heidegger to overcome metaphysics as onto-theology. He rejects the structure of thinking, as positing God as the absolute ground of being by way of analogical thinking. The path of Hegel, presenting the apogee of metaphysical thought, via Nietzsche and Husserl with their destruction of metaphysics and the introduction of phenomenology, stopped with

32 Bowen & Simmons (2022:2) align themselves with this pluralist position and consider scholars such as Marion, Westphal, and Hart to also belong here.

Heidegger.³³ “Onto-theology”, the neologism coined by Heidegger, describes the nature of the metaphysical enterprise. For Western metaphysics, since the Greeks, ontology and theology went hand in hand. The deity enters to function as *causa prima*, the ultimate Ratio, unifying as generative ground the wholeness of the whole. Heidegger exposes the West’s fanatical quest for the final ground of being. Worth noting, in this instance, is exactly what Heidegger rejects: the metaphysical God, the traditional God of reason. The death of God does not necessarily suggest atheism and nihilism. A different kind of thinking, the meditative, may allow the holy to unveil itself.³⁴

The quest in Continental Philosophy of Religion has been for thinking Transcendence beyond onto-theology subsequently. Thinkers such as Levinas, Ricoeur, Derrida, Marion, Caputo, and Kearney, as well as debates on the nature of phenomenology, on weak thought, the event, alterity, kenosis, and apophasis have all come to constitute a vibrant and multifaceted discourse.³⁵ Despite big differences, Simmons (2008:926) identifies *five commonalities* in the movement: there is an explicit conviction that what these scholars are doing is philosophy and not theology; there is a connection between God and the Other; kenosis is central for understanding God; the focus is on the immediacy of religious experience, expression is difficult, and a post-foundationalist epistemology of trust is present.

The central concern is to think and speak *God beyond onto-theology*. The challenge is how to do this in a more authentic way, to refer to the divine not contaminated by being, or otherwise than being. This involves two moves (see Jonkers 2005:11): to think à *Dieu*, towards the totally other, but also *adieu*, that is, attending to radical Alterity and saying farewell to onto-theology. The quest is for a divine God. The critique of ontotheology is inherently a critique of idols; it tries to master transcendence to the extent that one could say that “every concept of God does violence to God” (Schrijvers 2006:303, 313). New categories of thinking have emerged, which try to avoid the typical casual pattern, asserting God as the *prima causa*.

33 For a clear and succinct discussion of these developments, see Jonkers (2005:3-7).

34 For an excellent treatment, see Peacocke (1998), who describes Heidegger’s complex use of terms such as “theology”, “philosophy”, and thinking. He also accounts for how Heidegger leaves the question open for the possibility of God (1998:187-192).

35 One of the best introductory overviews is arguably the work by Gschwandtner (2013), who gives an informative description of the major thinkers in the movement.

Basically, in all the projects from Levinas to Caputo, one finds the emphasis on *excess* (see Gschwandtner 2013:287). Marion is of particular relevance and importance, in this instance. The central premise of his phenomenology is the primacy of *givenness*. This is a radicalisation of Husserl's phenomenology, as it liberates it from metaphysics. Givenness is unconditional and irreducible (see James 2012:21-25) and includes phenomena of saturation. This refers, for Marion, to givenness free from any conditioning. These appear outside of the Kantian categories of understanding (quality, quantity, relation, or analogy) (James 2012:32), beyond any dependence on a finite horizon.

The work by Caputo is also worth mentioning. In his work, one comes across notions that could be considered in a constructive Systematic Theology of God. In his radical hermeneutics, he emphasises "event", the weakness of God, a theology of "perhaps". The critical question, however, is: To what extent has he taken deconstruction to its final consequences? What remains of "God"? For him, "God" is a name for a call that "insists", rather than exists. It is an event that translates into a form of life. *Kenosis*,³⁶ in his philosophy of religion, could result in a total eclipse of God. Ultimately, he speaks about an "impossible God".³⁷

Otherness or alterity plays a crucial role in this discourse. Otherness allows for some form of transcending. The critique of ontotheology is, indeed, this quest for a space of transgression, or for an openness for Otherness (Henriksen 2010:163). This will become clear in the philosophy of Kearney in the next section.

Verhoef (2017:180, 181) summarises the impact of the discourse in Continental Philosophy of Religion well. The space for theology has not been eliminated; it has been transformed. A radical metaphysical understanding of God is no longer tenable. Continued reinterpretation is required.

36 For a recent and informed discussion of a phenomenology of *kenosis*, see Cassidy-Deketelaere (2022), who identifies various senses of *kenosis*, and finally argues for a kenotic turn of contemporary phenomenology itself, which results in a radical de-theologising of the enterprise.

37 For a fascinating treatment, see Kearney (2021:573, 583).

Recommended further reading

The following works represent an excellent overview of the religious views of major philosophers from Kant to the present; two classic texts by Marion and Caputo; a treatment of the idiosyncratic views of Heidegger, and one well-informed description of current French phenomenology.

CAPUTO, J.D.

2006. *The weakness of God: A theology of the event*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

GOODCHILD, P. & PHELPS, H.

2017. *Religion and European philosophy: Key thinkers from Kant to Žižek*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315642253>

GSCHWANDTNER, C.M.

2019. What is phenomenology of religion? (Part II): The phenomenology of religious experience. *Philosophy Compass* 14:e12567. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12567>.

MARION, J-L.

1991. *God without being*. Chicago, ILL: University of Chicago Press.

VEDDER, B.

2007. *Heidegger's philosophy of religion: From God to the Gods*. Pittsburgh, PN: Duquesne University Press.

2.10 Anatheism - The God who may be

Richard Kearney, a prominent participant in the contemporary Continental Philosophy of Religion movement to think the divine in a post-ontotheological fashion, has made unique contributions. What makes this renaissance man such an attractive thinker is not only his impressive acquaintance with philosophical traditions, but also his openness to religious thought in general, his aesthetic antenna, and his acute political awareness. The prominent motifs in his philosophy such as the “possible”, eschatology of everyday life, alterity, bodiliness, and touch are exceptionally promising for an engagement by Christian theology. Terms such as “anatheism”, carnal and diacritical hermeneutics have become associated with his name. His resolute commitment to move beyond the omni-God, the Alpha God of traditional theism, must be borne in mind. A reader is constantly confronted by novel interpretations in his “theo-poetics”. His difference from Caputo is of importance and should be carefully noted. This is seen in a pronounced manner in his impressive discussion of *khora* (Kearney 2003:193-211). This enigmatic notion, first mentioned by Plato, has intrigued thinkers about its precise referent. For thinkers such as Derrida and Caputo, this has no meaning, no identity;

it is a dark bottomless abyss, a void of empty space. It is a-theological and a-donational. According to Kearney, deconstruction has a preferential option for *khora*, and is more “archi-ultimate than God” (2003:203, 205). What he finds problematic, for example in Caputo’s thought, is that *khora* is an alternative to theology; it is either *khora* or God. He himself considers it a “third way of posse”, a space where the divine may dwell, where there could be a “play between *khora* and hyperousia” (2003:193, 208). In this regard, Kearney (2003:207) makes a significant remark: “not every notion of the Trinitarian God ... is a fetish of presence or hyperpresence”.

Kearney established himself as a major post-metaphysical thinker with his work *The God who may be* (2001a). Central in this study is an interpretation of Exodus 3:14. Equating YHWH with being - God is Being itself - inaugurated ontotheology. Kearney (2001b:155) submits an alternative interpretation: “I am who may be”, which he labels “onto-eschatological”, or a “poetics of the possible”. God’s *esse* is revealed as *posse*: “God neither is nor is not, but may be” (Kearney 2001a:1). Kearney steers a course, in this instance, between atheism and ontotheological theism. His positioning within the wider postmodern naming of God is critical, in this instance. If God has no being (like Marion’s view), alterity is so other, so unrecognisable that it becomes impossible to distinguish it from monstrosity (Kearney 2001b:167, 180 n45). Kearney’s proposal suggests a new interpretation of God and being, a “rediscovery of *posse in esse*” (2006:15). God keeps godself open for a future. Within the broader context in the narrative, there is a displacement from an ancestral deity to a salvific God. And then – and this is crucial in Kearney’s thought – a commitment to a shared history of becoming (2001b:161): a relationship is established “of mutual answerability and co-creation” (2001b:162); “God can be God only if we enable this to happen” (2001a:2); and “Divinity capacitates humanity and, in return, humanity reactivates divinity” (2006:16). Kearney is right: “So much depends, then, on what we mean by the *possible*” (Kearney 2007:58).

Kearney’s (2006:5) train of thought moves obviously into the terrain of the eschatological. He describes his own contribution as a “fourth reduction”, an eschatological one. The well-known context, in this instance, is the radicalisations of phenomenology, that is, the reorientation of consciousness – transcendently (*essence*), ontologically (*being*), and donologically (*gift*) by Husserl, Heidegger and Marion successively. Kearney’s (2006:6) redirection is to the everyday, the manifestation of the divine

in the color of their eyes, in the lines of their hands and fingers, in the cracked tone of voices, in all the tiny epiphanies of flesh and blood (2006:7).

This micro-eschatological “possibilizes” the other three reductions and signals a return to poetics (2006:12).

Kearney coined the term “anatheism” to refer to his position of a God after God, of returning to God after having left God. This represents for him a historical-cultural phenomenon; it coincides with the cultural situation that comes after the death of God. He is fairly sensitive about what we mean when speaking of God – “so much depends ... on what we mean by God” (Kearney 2010:xiv). Anatheism opens a space for questioning God, a space for endless interpretation for the Absolute and requires pluralism and not absolutism. This differs from atheism and theism, as it resists absolute positions against, as well as for the divine (2010:16). It should be noted that Kearney’s position is fairly nuanced. Anatheism is not a dialectical third term that supersedes theism and atheism; it contains a moment of both (Kearney 2017:35). It entails a retrieval of liberated faith. Within this context, one can clarify what Kearney (2009:167) wants to leave behind: the God of metaphysical causality and theodicy; this is his *adieu*. God is not a thing out there that can be described in an essentialist manner: “God is a call, cry, summons” (Kearney 2016:141). He thinks of God in terms of the “more” the “surplus”, and the “surprise”, the “enabling God” (2009:182). His eschatological thrust surfaces again, in this instance, as the eschatology of the possible. The space of anatheistic thinking does not represent a *fait accompli*, but a “wager” to be made again and again (2009:1983). This is a central motif in his philosophy and is not about calculation and blind leaps, but about imagination and hospitality (2010:xvii). It is about re-imagining the Sacred in “the least of these” (2017:35); Kearney’s (2007:53) God is “a God of ‘small things’”, a “kenotic God” (2016:258). One should also refer in this context to his preference for *theo-poetics*, as anatheism requires it (2017:37). It is not about abstract systems of thought, but about imagination. Kearney thinks, in this instance, and it is critical to see this, in terms of “mutual recreation between the human and the divine ... God co-depends on us”; “divine *poiesis* relates to human *praxis*” (2017:32, 34): “It is we who must help God to be God” (2007:55).³⁸

Theopoiesis brings us to Kearney’s appreciation for artistic expression and also for the Rublev’s icon of the Trinity. He is convinced that artwork goes deeper and wider than theoretical theology (2017:41). In the icon, Kearney highlights several aspects: the perichoretic dance by the three

38 The influence of Ety Hillesum should be acknowledged, in this instance.

persons, but then especially also the empty chalice. This is a “drama of lived hospitality” (2017:30). The chalice represents a “fourth person”; it is the *chora* of “endless possibility” (2017:39). Kearney is especially interested in this space – “a symbol of the gap in our horizons of time and space where the radically Other may arrive” (2010:25). This fourth dimension signifies the empty space of the ordinary (2006:10), where the eschatological will be realised in the presence of the alien in our midst (2010:29). Relationships and spaces go together: for Kearney, this triune God is the “interstitial deity” (2016:252); “in the beginning was the Relationship” (2017:41).

There is a certain attractiveness in Kearney’s project to imagine the divine anew after ontotheology. At the same time, the systematic theologian cannot suppress some “anxiety” (see Venter 2018:247-250). Benjamins (2015:120) rightly points out that Kearney does not consider the possibility of a God who reveals or identifies godself. This kenotic God requires some form of sacramental mediation, where an interplay between the self and the stranger can take place. Tracy (2016:222-228) credits Kearney for having succeeded in uniting a philosophical vision with a way of life – atheism is finally a way of life (2016:222). But he also has critical questions, especially about the understanding of power, kenosis, and messianism in Kearney’s work. For me, the critical question is whether the successive reductions in the phenomenology have truncated the divine that we end up with a notion of the divine who is so dependent on us, that not even atheism could save God, as “God is up to us, in the end” (Kearney 2016:250). Might this be the final theo-trajectory before an aggressive atheism triumphs?

Recommended further reading

The following recommendations include an interesting autobiographical sketch by Kearney himself, a series of conversations he held with prominent contemporary philosophers on God, a critical description of his project by Caputo, a long interlocuter, and two volumes of essays engaging with aspects of Kearney’s oeuvre.

CAPUTO, J.D.

2021. Where is Richard Kearney coming from? Hospitality, atheism, and ana-deconstruction. *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 47(5):551-569. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01914537211021929>

KEARNEY, R.

2018. Where I speak from: A short intellectual autobiography. In: D.P. Veldsman & Y. Steenkamp (eds), pp. 31-62. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2018.BK94.02>

KEARNEY, R. & ZIMMERMANN, J. (EDS)

2016. *Reimagining the sacred: Richard Kearney debates God*. New York: Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/columbia/9780231161039.001.0001>

MANOUSSAKIS, J.P.

2006. *After God: Richard Kearney and the religious turn in continental philosophy*. New York: Fordham University Press.

VELDSMAN, D.P. & STEENKAMP, Y. (EDS)

2018. *Debating otherness with Richard Kearney: Perspectives from South Africa*. Durbanville: AOSIS. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2018.BK94>

2.11 The impossible God - Incomprehensible and hidden

Together with the Old Testament scholar Brueggemann, the philosopher of religion Kearney, and the systematic theologians Barth and Moltmann, David Tracy should be considered a truly major god thinker of the past one hundred years. This Catholic theologian from Chicago is “God-obsessed” (Gibson 2010:14), a sustained effort to name God for the contemporary era. He has become exceptionally influential with his approach to theology as hermeneutical and public, with key terminology such as “publics of theology” and the “fragment”, and with notions such as “plurality and ambiguity” and “mystical-prophetic”. Since his Gifford lectures (1999/2000), he has indicated that he is working on a “big book” on God that has not yet been published. In several articles and interviews, he has, however, delineated the main contours of his thinking on God. What makes him particularly *relevant* for my line of argumentation, especially in this section on a theo-genealogy, is his intentional effort to move beyond the relational paradigm and to articulate an explicit postmodern vision of God.

As background to Tracy’s thought, one should bear in mind his acute antenna to “name the present”, that is, to engage with *postmodernity* and to critique modernity, and to be sensitive to the many forms of *suffering*. As a postmodern thinker, he wants to break with totality systems and attend to the “other” (Malcolm 2002:27). Consequently, he resists the reduction of everything to more of the same, and the exclusion of what is different (Tracy 2000:68). He views “radical suffering” as the principal philosophical and theological issue of our time (Tracy 2016:27). The meaning of suffering and the reality of the other destroy confident versions of history and allow for the “return of God” (Tracy 1994:43).

The notion of “form” is central to Tracy’s approach to name God anew. One cannot understand the Western intellectual if the question of *form* is not taken prominently into account (Tracy 2005b:49). He situates the recent interest in form in the context of the resistance to the embrace of modernity. Theologically, the Word has always taken form in Christ and the Trinity (Tracy 2005b:50). It is crucial for Tracy and for his subsequent

construal of a vision of God to identify two basic religious forms in the Bible: the prophetic and the sapiential or meditative (Tracy 2005b:54). He combines these two in the category of the prophetic-mystical. The prophetic is associated and radicalised with the apocalyptic and gives expression to the ethical (Tracy 2005b:55). The sapiential or meditative form is, in turn, linked to love, as well as to dark realities such as lament or tragedy (Tracy 2000:75). By linking the task of naming God with “form” and substantiating it in this manner opens vast possibilities for speaking the divine .

Tracy has an exceptional historical command of the theological tradition and wants to move beyond the Patristic and Medieval focus on God as intelligence and love, and the modernist one on relationality. He credits modernity, under the influence of Hegel, with the outstanding achievement of naming God in terms of relationality (Tracy 2011:123). He, however, has his reservations about its overconfidence and non-apophatic character (Tracy 2011:123); hence, his project to move beyond it. Theo-logy – the speaking of the logos under conditions of intelligibility (Tracy 1994:37) – implies for him as postmodern to employ the idea of the “Impossible” (Tracy 2011:124), a term which he finds already with Kierkegaard (Tracy 2000:71) and later with Derrida (Tracy 2006:343) and which he uses to fight systems of totalisation.³⁹

He then develops his understanding of God as “Impossible”, in line with his interpretation of forms, from two specific perspectives: *hiddenness* and *incomprehensibility*. This is his move beyond the modernist paradigm of relationality. For Tracy, the major historical exponent of hiddenness is to be found with Luther. His own interpretation is fairly unique. He connects it to history, and with the suffering of the non-person, those who are oppressed and marginalised, on the one hand, and with the “abyss, chasm, chaos, horror”, on the other (Tracy 2000:82). This understanding of hiddenness is novel; it allows for a historical-political reading (Tracy 1996:9), and it retrieves motifs such as lament and tragedy⁴⁰ that were hitherto neglected. For Tracy, Dionysius the Areopagite exemplifies thinking about God and incomprehensibility. The limits of language come into focus with this emphasis, as well as a new estimation of the apophatic tradition. Love

39 In the last phase of this theological development, Tracy increasingly employs the idea of “Absolute Infinity”. His promised big book is allegedly an exploration of this in a trinitarian fashion (see interview with Woodward, 2019).

40 The idea of the “tragic” in Tracy’s thought warrants a separate study. He regards natural catastrophes as “tragic necessities” (Tracy 2016:28). At the same time, he wants to free the human from the Augustinian heritage that blames humanity for all suffering and evil (Tracy 2005a:106).

appears as more than relationality; it is a transgressive, excessive, sheer gift (Tracy 2011:127). For Tracy, biblical books such as Job, Lamentation and Song of Songs become important traditions conveying these accents. Tracy (2011:124) keeps on emphasising that this impossible, hidden, incomprehensible, and excessively loving God is radically disruptive; there is no onto-theological deity in this instance.

One final remark about Tracy and the doctrine of the Trinity may be pertinent. Part of his project is to overcome the fatal separations of modernity, one of which is the division between theology and spirituality. In this context, writing about the trinitarian “form of the divine reality”, he defends the “form of speculation”. In addition to realistic forms of narrative, doctrine, and liturgy to give expression to the economic Trinity, Tracy (1999:287) allows for *speculation* about the immanent Trinity. He (2002:29) considers this advocacy a shift in his thinking:

I have been driven to think that some such speculation is needed if we are to speak of the immanent Trinity.

Recommended further reading

The sources recommended include a full treatment of Tracy’s oeuvre and his theology, a recent interview with him, and three of his outputs, namely a collection of essays, and articles on the infinite and on spirituality.

OKEY, S.

2018. *A theology of conversation: An introduction to David Tracy*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

TRACY, D.

2018. God as infinite: Ethical implications. In: M. Renaud & J. Daniel (eds), *God and the moral life* (London: Routledge), pp. 135-156. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315142975-9>

2020a. *Fragments: The existential situation of our time*. Chicago, ILL: University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226584508.001.0001>

2020b. Metaphysics, theology, and the mystical. In: E. Howells & M.A. McIntosh (eds), *The Oxford handbook of mystical theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 425-449. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198722380.013.22>

WOODWARD, K.L.

2019. In praise of fragments: An interview with David Tracy. *Commonweal Magazine*, 25 September: 11 pages.

3. ELEMENTS OF A TRINITARIAN GRAMMAR

3.1 *Who is God?* Trinitarian fundamentals and enduring contributions

3.1.1 God as event – Barth’s contribution

Barth’s accomplishments are vast, and there are many good studies of his doctrine of God. In a recent general overview of his doctrine of God, Sonderegger (2019:213, 225) rightly labels it “startling new” and “revolutionary”. One cannot think about the Christian naming of God as triune and not attend to the grammar that transpires in Barth’s treatment. In this short description, five major perspectives are merely identified.

First, in Barth’s (1975:303) multi-volume *Church dogmatics*, the *location* of the Trinity in Volume 1/1 is decisive. By placing it there, Barth intentionally wants to emphasise that “its content [is] decisive and controlling for the whole of dogmatics”. No student of the trinitarian doctrine can miss the contrast with Schleiermacher’s positioning thereof at the end of *The Christian faith*.⁴¹ Decisions about doctrinal structuring ultimately have a fundamental impact. The Trinity, however, is more than the conclusion of an argument; it allows for a basic optic, a way of viewing the Christian interpretation of reality.

Secondly, Barth (1975:311) firmly connects the Trinity to the doctrine of *revelation* as the self-interpretation of God. The Trinity answers the question: Who is God? This is the “business of the doctrine of the Trinity” (Barth 1975:301). The Trinity is the “basic presupposition of the doctrine of God” (Barth 1975:312). Connecting the Trinity so intimately to revelation emphasises three aspects: *God* reveals himself *through himself*, and he reveals *himself*.⁴² The subject, the act and the effect of revelation are one, or the Revealer, the Revelation and the Revealedness (Barth 1975:296). Revelation is the self-interpretation of this God.

Thirdly, Barth (1975:479) closely ties statements of the *immanent Trinity* to God’s work in the *economy*. What one encounters in revelation “is His reality in all depths of eternity”. God is “precisely the One He is in showing and giving Himself” (Barth 1975:382; see also 479). Grenz (2004:48) comments, in this instance, that the economic Trinity is the noetic starting point for Barth, but the immanent Trinity retains the ontic priority. Barth

41 The exact function of placing the doctrine at the end is interpreted in various ways. An astute scholar such as Schüssler Fiorenza (2005:175) does not regard this as a “marginalization”, but rather as the “conclusion” by Schleiermacher of his emphasis that God is love and not power.

42 The pronoun as used by Barth is reflected, in this instance.

(1957:317) does not shy away from speaking about “otherness in God” and of “relationality”: “He is in Himself ... relationship, the basis and prototype of all relationship” (Barth 1957:641). It may be worth noting, in this instance, that, when Barth (1975:432) discusses Jesus as Eternal Son of God, he considers the “begetting” as “*the divine mystery*”. Already when God begets the Son, God negates in himself self-isolation: “from all eternity ... God is orientated to the Other” (Barth 1975:483). Torrance (2000:85) refers, in this context, to the coherence of Barth’s theological enterprise; he remarkably holds together the articulation of the interrelatedness of God’s triune being and the nature of God’s being in relation to human beings. Barth makes striking statements with regard to the essence of God, the divine as such: the fellowship in Godself is extended to humanity –

what He seeks and creates between himself and us is in fact nothing else but what He wills and completes and therefore is in Himself (Barth 1957:275).

Fellowship, relationality, and love go together.

Fourthly, in *Church dogmatics 2/1*, there are far-reaching perspectives on God, to which one can only briefly refer. Barth (1957:260, 263) innovatively refers to “God’s life”, resisting an absorption of the doctrine of God in a doctrine of being: “God’s Godhead consists in the fact that it is an event”. God is who He is in his works (Barth 1957:260). There is something radically dynamic to his approach to God; God should be understood as *event*, as act, as life (Barth 1957:264). To say that God is, is to say that God loves. Being and act are the same; they go together.

Fifthly, “what makes God God” is the fact that God loves in freedom (Barth 1957:273). For Barth, the answer to the questions about who God is, or what nature God is, is the same: The One who loves in freedom (Barth 1957:331). Finally, the long section on the divine “perfections” is fairly impressive. It follows the discussion of the Trinity, and the attributes are treated in dialectical pairs such as, for example, patience and wisdom, constancy and omnipotence. The order of treatment – only *after* a discussion of the Trinity – is a far-reaching insight. One cannot discuss this in full in this purview. Two notes can be offered. Barth’s originality can clearly be noted when he thematises God’s spatiality in a discussion about omnipresence – “God possesses space” (see Barth 1957:468, and the entire section 461-490). When concluding with the glory of God, Barth (1975:640-677) interprets it in aesthetic terms – “God is also beautiful”; “He is the basis and standard of everything that is beautiful and of all ideas of the beautiful” (Barth 1957:656). Without a trinitarian perspective on God,

one could hardly have ascribed these qualities to the divine.⁴³ Surprising avenues open when one resists a prior metaphysical determination of what deity entails, but allows God to determine Godself in revelation.

The richness of Barth's theology cannot be captured in this summary, but the direction of his thinking is clear. The positioning of the doctrine in an overarching scheme, the emphasis on divine agency, the intimate link between immanent and economic Trinity, the prioritising of eventfulness, relationality, love, and freedom, as well as a trinitarian determination of divine perfections are grammatical achievements that have until now not been overtaken in contemporary discourse. Ultimately, Barth (1975:3) accomplished what he set out to do in terms of the discipline of Dogmatics, a distinct field of study tasked with examining the content of the church's distinctive talk about God. He did so in such a manner that it should be heeded in future God talk.

Recommended further reading

Major and standard interpretations of Barth's doctrine of God and of his trinitarian views are recommended, as well as more recent explorations of aspects of his thought in this regard by well-known Barth scholars.

HABETS, M. & TOLLIDAY, P. (EDS)

2011. *Trinitarian theology after Barth*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1cgf2j9>

JOHNSON, W.S.

1997. *The mystery of God: Karl Barth and the postmodern foundations of theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.

JÜNGEL, E.

2001. *God's being is in becoming: The trinitarian being of God in the theology of Karl Barth. A paraphrase*. Translated by J Webster. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567690906>

MCCORMACK, B.L.

2019. Trinity. In: P.D. Jones & P.T. Nimmo (eds), *The Oxford handbook of Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 227-245. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199689781.013.15>

PRICE, R.B.

2011. *Letters of the divine word: The perfections of God in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*. London: T. & T. Clark.

43 See Barth's express comments on space (1957:468), and on beauty (1957:659).

3.1.2 God and temporal events – Jenson’s contribution

Robert Jenson (1930-2017) is one of the prominent theologians of the so-called trinitarian renaissance of the last half of the twentieth century. To appreciate his contribution, one should place him in the context of the reception of Barth. His work *God after God: The God of the past and the God of the future, seen in the work of Karl Barth* (1969/2010) is also a major study of this theologian’s trinitarian theology. Some of the central motifs (identity of God, eternity and time, as well as beauty) of Jenson’s project cannot be understood without considering the ground-breaking achievement of Barth. Jenson is, for this reflection, relevant because of his appreciation of the importance of the God issue for systematic theology, and for several critical insights into construing a Christian doctrine of God.

The notion of “identity” is central in Jenson’s view of the Trinity. He considers Barth’s question, “Who is God”, as part of the doctrine of the Trinity, as one of his greatest achievements. Jenson (1997:60)⁴⁴ follows Barth in this regard, stating that “[t]he primal systematic function of trinitarian teaching is to *identify* the *theos* in “theology””. It is interesting to note that Jenson (1997:12, 42) finds this identification of God in the biblical narrative of the resurrection. For him, the temporality of events such as the exodus and the resurrection is outstanding: temporal events belong to God (1997:49).⁴⁵ God is identified *by* and *with* these events, which Jenson (1997:71) labels as dramatic narratives, “in the life of God”.⁴⁶ The biblical God is not immune to time. Having stated this, Jenson (1997:55) moves subsequently to the issue of eternity as the chief diagnostic question of a religion. With this as background, Jenson (1997:75) proceeds argumentatively to the *dramatis dei personae* – the “characters of the drama of God”, and the deepest mystery of God’s identity is that the God of Israel appears as one of the *personae dramatis*, thus necessitating the doctrine of the Trinity (Jenson 1997:89). Jenson’s reading of the Patristic dilemma concerning time/eternity is fairly impressive, referring to attempts to escape from captivity in time by asserting the deity’s capacity for degrees of divine ness or time-denying predicates such as impassibility (Jenson

44 The first volume of Jenson’s *Systematic Theology – The triune God* (1997) will be used as primary source for this summary of his views.

45 According to Grenz (2004:110), this is Jenson’s central contribution to trinitarian theology.

46 In a recent contribution, Jenson (2018:14) returns to the crucial decision a theologian should make about the ontological weight which the overall narrative character of the Bible conveys and the plot the story tells. He stresses the continued task of revising Greek religious metaphysics by biblical gospel narrative. Jenson identifies himself thus with a strong interpretation of the Rahner rule (see Grenz 2004:112).

1997:94). The church's most decisive achievement was to differentiate the God of the Gospel from the God of that culture (Jenson 1997:103). In this instance, one encounters a decision about the "eventful differentiation in God himself" (Jenson 1997:102).⁴⁷ Jenson then makes his decisive move: the action of the triune God is limitless; God takes time, and his eternity is "temporal infinity" (Jenson 1997:217). He interlinks love, infinity, time, and eternity.

The importance Jenson assigns to *pneumatology* should be highlighted. Jenson (1997:154) credits Barth for appreciating the Trinity as the framework within which theological puzzles are to be addressed, but he is critical whether Barth does not remain trapped in the typical Western conception of the Spirit as the bond of love between Father and Son, which results in a mere binity. Jenson (1997:157) moves way beyond this: "The Spirit is the Liveliness of the divine life because he is the Power of the divine future"; that is, "the fulfilment not only of created life but of the divine life". Jenson (1997:157) tries to redress a long-standing tradition to prioritise the protological character of the divine to the detriment of the eschatological. In this instance, Jenson (1997:160) appeals to the resurrection – the "great occurrence of dramatic causality in God". Three elements transpire in Jenson's trinitarian identification of the Christian God: narrativity, temporality, and eschatology (see Grenz 2004:113).

Jenson raises the issue about "the point of trinitarian theology", a cypher one often finds in a bewilderingly diverse state of scholarship which is helpful to guide thinking. Jenson's (1995b:37) answer is helpful. The function of trinitarian theology is to stress that the biblical story of God and human beings is true for God himself. Here again, he returns to the question about temporality and eternity. God's eternity is not simply the absence of time. As God's life is "constituted in a structure of relations, whose content is narrative", *time* is the "accommodation God makes in his living and moving eternity, for others than himself" (Jenson 1995b:40). The triune life is open to others; it is "roomy" (Jenson 1997:226). And that room that God makes is our creaturely time.

Jenson's (2004:414) originality is noticeable in his view that one could talk about a "polity in God". Entry into the kingdom is also entry into the triune life and the *polity* that this represents. One finds in the triune God a plurality of *social personae*, each with his/her own role and in total self-giving to the others. Without hesitation, and on this basis, Jenson

47 Jenson's (1997:108) critique of the Patristic period should be noted: the indecision about *impassibility*, the loss of an interpretation of Logos as *God's speech*, and restriction of *relations to origin* and the ignoring of God's eschatological character.

(2004:415) speaks about the “eternal political life of God”. *Totus Christus* implies that the second person of the Trinity includes the church within this moral space.

Like his great predecessor Barth, Jenson appreciates *beauty*. For him, God is also an event, because something happens between Jesus and his Father in their Spirit, and this harmonious perichoresis sings beautifully. Ultimately, Jenson (1997:236) can claim: “God is a great fugue.”

There is something deeply *attractive* in Jenson’s theology; he allows an arcane doctrine to become intellectually intriguing. His connection of the trinitarian doctrine with notions of identity, with narrative, and with temporality are enduring feats. The re-valuation of pneumatology, the consistent relation of immanent and economic Trinity, the invitation of “roominess”, and the acknowledgement of beauty are evidence of his stature as major trinitarian thinker.

Recommended further reading

Various discussions of Jenson’s theology, in general, and of his trinitarian views are recommended.

EAST, B.

2017. What is the doctrine of the Trinity for? Practicality and projection in Robert Jenson’s theology. *Modern Theology* 33(3):414-433. <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12334>

GRENZ, S.J.

2003. The divine fugue: Robert Jenson’s renewed trinitarianism. *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30(2):211-216.

GUNTON, C. (Ed.)

2011 (2000 original). *Trinity, time and church: A response to the theology of Robert W. Jenson*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

VERHOEF, A.

2011. Timelessness, Trinity and temporality. *Acta Academica* 43(2):82-112.

WRIGHT, S.J. & GREEN, C.E.W. (Eds)

2017. *The promise of Robert W. Jenson’s theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1pwt849>

3.1.3 The Trinity as practical doctrine – LaCugna's contribution

The story of LaCugna's trinitarian work, her concentrated intellectual endeavour, and her premature death at the age of forty-four years, is part of the history of the trinitarian renaissance and needs to be told. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (1952-1997), former Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, produced a remarkable corpus of work on the Trinity in her short academic career. Her award-winning book *God for us: The Trinity and the Christian life* (1991a) and an array of substantial articles and contributions to volumes are evidence of her intense and exclusive focus on the doctrine of the Trinity. Apart from honouring her contribution to this field, I believe that her work comprises some of the most significant challenges to the trinitarian discourse. Not only will her book *God for us: The Trinity and the Christian life* remain one of the seminal reference sources, but her research highlights some of the most *prominent issues* in trinitarian discussion. The ambitious scope of her project should not escape notice. Ultimately, she wants to restore the doctrine of the Trinity to the centre of theology and Christian life.

Basic to her theology and, arguably, one of her most decisive contributions to the trinitarian discourse is her rephrasing of the *central problem* to be addressed. The conundrum of oneness and threeness and how to establish reconciliation is not the issue as one finds so prominently in Latin trinitarian reflection; it is rather

the question of how the trinitarian pattern of salvation history is to be correlated with the eternal being of God (LaCugna 1991a:4).

The central theme of the doctrine of the Trinity, the "subject matter" is the relationship between the *oikonomia* and the *theologia* (LaCugna 1991a:22).

LaCugna (1991a:7) wants to address the "virtually total irrelevance of the doctrine of the Trinity". She describes the eclipse and neglect of the doctrine theologically, spiritually, and politically after its emergence as the *defeat* of the Trinity. Central to her work is identifying *the cause* for a rupture between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, starting with the Nicene decision that solidified in the theologies of Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas. The fatal historical impetus came from Arius and the ensuing polemic which resulted in the *homoousios* decision of Nicaea. Arius diverted Christian theology from the *oikonomia* to an ontology of *theologia*. Increasing attention was directed towards the intradivine relationality, to God *in se*, with a subsequent disconnection of the reflection on God from soteriology or God *for us* (LaCugna 1991a:12). This disjunction is of cardinal

importance for LaCugna: it provides the hermeneutical key to interpret the history of the doctrine and to articulate a vision for its rehabilitation.

She accepts *Rahner's* well-known *axiom* – the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and *vice versa*⁴⁸ – as a good starting point to rethink the Christian doctrine of God (see the extensive treatment in LaCugna 1985). Rahner's proposal functions as an epistemic principle for her: the only starting point could be the economy of salvation. LaCugna (1991a:221) expressly parts ways with Rahner on one crucial issue: she cannot accept that economic distinctions are grounded in distinctions "in" God. This leads to the crux of LaCugna's project. The relation between *economic* and *immanent Trinity* may simultaneously be the central and the most controversial aspect of her work. LaCugna is unambiguous about what is unacceptable; she expressly rejects the possibility of "a *deus absconditus* who lurks behind *deus revelatus*" (LaCugna 1991a:211, 322); "a hidden realm of intradivine relations" (:222); "an intradivine realm" (:223); "an intradivine Trinity of persons" (:224); a "God *in se*" (:225); "a transeconomic perspective" (:227); "the notion of God's inner life" (:229), and "two sets of communion" (:274). She is adamant that "there is nothing 'in' God ... whether it be attributes or relations or a Trinity of persons" (:225). In addition, she abandons the terms "economic Trinity" and "immanent Trinity" (:223). She (1991a:383) puts her case in strong language:

Indeed, the ultimate theological error, the ultimate non-orthodoxy or heresy or untruth about God, would be to think of God as living in an altogether separate household, living entirely for Godself, by Godself, within Godself.

After this account of the negative dimension of her vision, one can delineate her proposal. According to her, the distinction between economic Trinity and immanent Trinity is strictly *conceptual*, and not ontological. She abandons the terms "immanent Trinity" and "economic Trinity", and only uses the categories *oikonomia* and *theologia*. According to her, *oikonomia* is not the Trinity *ad extra*, but "the comprehensive plan of God reaching from creation to consummation"; *theologia*, on the other hand, is not the Trinity *in se*, but simply the "mystery of God" (LaCugna 1991a:223). LaCugna's (1991a:221) revision of the Rahner axiom is as follows: "*theologia* is fully revealed and bestowed in *oikonomia*, and *oikonomia* truly expresses the ineffable mystery of *theologia*". The interrelationships of divine persons

48 The seminal text is Rahner's *The Trinity*, originally published in 1967. Interestingly, LaCugna wrote an extensive introduction to the 1997 English edition. For an excellent discussion of various interpretations, see Sanders (2001).

are not located in an intradivine sphere, but in the mystery of the economy, “which is where God exists anyway” (LaCugna 1991a:369, n. 1).

Having established the essential unity of the *oikonomia* and the *theologia*, LaCugna infers *two principles* for the practice of doing trinitarian theology: all thinking about God must start with the economy of God, and all reflection must be related to soteriology. According to her, “[t]he economy of salvation is the basis, the content and the final criterion for every statement about God” (LaCugna 1991a:22). Soteriology becomes decisive for thinking about the Christian God. Although she does not emphasise it strongly and explicitly, but the motif that can be gleaned from the whole tenor of the argument is her conviction that trinitarian theology could be done according to pre-Nicene principles. Prior to Nicaea, the emphasis was on the economy and not on the intradivine self-relationality of God (LaCugna 1991a:101, 223).

Unlike some prominent trinitarian thinkers, LaCugna (1992:681) retains the category *person* and redefines it. The shift in her project to a more Eastern-oriented and -informed trinitarianism, from substance ontology to relational ontology, is also most conspicuous at this point. By following the Eastern line, LaCugna opts for an ontology with *personhood* and *relationships* as critical and definitional categories. She continues using the category “person” because beneath it lies the category of relation (LaCugna 1985:648). It is noteworthy that, for her, *desire* as yearning for the other out of love becomes one of the features of personhood (LaCugna 1991a:351). However, throughout the work, certain categories for understanding the nature of the Christian God as Trinity crystallise and she obviously views them as not only revolutionising the doctrine of God, but also as incapacitating all endeavours of approaching the God issue generically. The Christian God is to be understood in terms of *self-communicating love*, *relationality*, *differentiated personhood*, *communion*, *fecundity*, and *ecstasy* (see her detailed exposition, LaCugna 1991a:288-292).

The *mystery and incomprehensibility* of God is one of the themes usually treated alongside the doctrine of the Trinity. LaCugna’s project shows no exception to this standard practice; *how* she understands it and *what* function it plays deserves careful attention. The mystery is to be located – consistent with her methodological principle! – *in* the economy of salvation. The economy is as ineffable as the eternal mystery of God (LaCugna 1991a:322); “the mystery of God in the economy permanently remains ineffable mystery” (LaCugna 1991b:155). The reason for this is that God is personal. A person is, according to her, an ineffable mode of existence. To speak of God as mystery is another way of saying God is personal (LaCugna 1991b:156). A balance between apophatic and

cataphatic theology, or between silence and predication is crucial in trinitarian theology (LaCugna 1991a:333, 361). Apophatism protects the mystery of God; kataphasis permits statements to be made about the revelation of God in Christ and the Spirit.

The form of theological language that is commensurable with God's economy is *doxological*. A distinguishing feature and, arguably, one of the major contributions of LaCugna's trinitarian project emerges in this instance: her insistence on the importance of *liturgy* for the doctrine. She asserts that the overarching purpose of trinitarian theology is the praise of God (LaCugna 1991a:360). Trinitarian theology, as liturgical and doxological theology, shifts the attention away from the speculative conundrum about the oneness and threeness of God. The primary function of the liturgy for trinitarian reflection is thus to restrain speculation and to enable it to balance the incomprehensibility of God with our knowledge of God in Christ (LaCugna 1989b:6, 8).

One's impression is that, despite her thorough historical knowledge and impressive constructive theological ability, her deepest sentiments are liturgical, ecclesiastical, and *practical*. The axiom of her project is the following: "The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences for Christian life" (LaCugna 1991a:10). Basic to her argument is that the Christian life should be a form of life appropriate to God's economy. This includes the individual spiritual journey, ecclesial arrangements and socio-political practices. The trinitarian doctrine communicates an existential message of participation in the eternal relationality of God (LaCugna 1991b:178). In this regard, *baptism* plays a significant role in her understanding of the individual life before God. She understands baptism as "an incorporation ... into the history and story of God, into the life and heart and identity of God" (LaCugna 1989a:248). As such, it also establishes a radical ontological change. To live in the name of the triune God means appropriating the identity of God and living God's life (LaCugna 1991a:382, 400, 404). As baptism is also entry into a new social order carrying the ethical imperative of reconfiguring previous patterns of relationships and creating a community of interdependence, mutuality, reciprocal love, and self-sacrifice (LaCugna 1989a:247, 238). At present, the baptism could be a symbol of liberating relationships, enabling the church to be an icon of the triune God. A *trinitarian spirituality* emphasises that one should become what God's personal reality already is (LaCugna 1991b:189). *Socially*, the Trinity functions as a critical theological principle (LaCugna 1991a:17), and the basic principle to be followed is: "Divine relationality becomes the paradigm for every type of relationality in creation" (LaCugna 1991a:17, 168). Her sociopolitical perspectives

are derived from the reconstructed model of divine monarchy which she calls “trinitarian politics”, as it conveys the basic principle of communion among equals (LaCugna 1991a:388-400). The Trinity is a theology of “right relationships” (LaCugna 1992:681).

The sentiments of feminist theology figure prominently in LaCugna’s work and one is struck in her response by a balanced attitude to respect both tradition and contemporary experience. Because of its direct bearing on liturgy, *i.e.* how people worship, the feminist concern for adequate language for God, is no passing fad (LaCugna 1989b:9). Trinitarian language and specifically the baptism formula need not be inherently sexist and patriarchal. She encourages the depatriarchalising of the concept of God by using a variety of images and names, *provided* they reflect the relational nature of God and match some aspect of the pattern of salvation history (LaCugna 1993:106,109; 1989a:246). She believes the most effective response to the oppression of women and the contemporary feminist theological engagement is to argue that the best defence against sexism is to argue ontologically that “the being of God is utterly antithetical to every kind of subordination and subservience” (LaCugna 1991:287). For her, the deeper issue at stake is not language as such, but patterns of relationships in the church. By virtue of their baptism, believers are equal in the church; inclusive language must be matched by inclusive community.

There is something deeply *attractive* about LaCugna’s life work. She enriched trinitarian scholarship with her penetrating reading of the history of interpretation and her innovative constructive proposals. In light of her work, one cannot consider the Rahner axiom a closed matter. Her emphasis on liturgy, apophatism, baptism, and practical social implications are enduring contributions that any trinitarian construal will have to consider, even if one does not follow her in all detail. Her specific contribution is the contraction of major insights in a coherent project that continues to intrigue and stimulate.

Recommended further reading

The recommendations focus on treatments of the Rahner axiom, on discussions of LaCugna’s project, and a major general discussion by her and a collaborator on trinitarian theology.

BAIK, C-H.

2011. *The Holy Trinity – God for God and God for us: Seven positions on the immanent-economic Trinity relation in contemporary theology.* Eugene, OR: Pickwick.

BATTAGLIA, V.

2007. An examination of Karl Rahner’s trinitarian theology. *Australian eJournal of Theology* 9:1-18.

GROPPE, E.T.

2002. Catherine Mowry LaCugna's contribution to trinitarian theology. *Theological Studies* 63:730-763. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390206300404>

HILKERT, M.C.

1998. The mystery of persons in communion: The trinitarian theology of Catherine Mowry LaCugna. *Word & World* 18(3):237-243.

LACUGNA, C.M. & McDONNELL, K.

1988. Returning from "the far country": Theses for a contemporary trinitarian theology. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41:191-215. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600040783>

3.2 *What is God?* Divine attributes and primary associations

3.2.1 The attribute tradition – Approaches and challenges

Basically, in all doctrines of God, one finds treatments of divine attributes. Theologians are clearly inclined to describe the God worshipped by Christians, to indicate the difference between the deity and creation. It is possible to write an entire history of the attribute tradition in the various eras of history. Structurally, it has become conventional to classify the attributes as, for example, communicable and incommunicable. One pervasive and longstanding tradition has been the separation of a discussion of the One God together with the attributes from one of the Trinity which typically comes thereafter. This divorce has far-reaching consequences. Another feature is the neglect of obvious descriptions such as beauty and justice. A genealogy of the attribute traditions betrays deep philosophical influences and – this is crucial – the operative historical conceptions of divinity of the time under consideration. A history could be written of how people, over various periods of human civilisation, considered and conceptualised Ultimacy, or the Sacred. In this brief and limited section, the interest lies basically in one major shift that has taken place since the contribution of Barth – to consider attributes in a trinitarian way. At stake, in this instance, is the resistance to what Gunton (2002:2) describes as the “hybrid of two organisms”, and the retrieval of the Trinity to determine the interpretation of attributes. Only a few historical milestones will be mentioned.⁴⁹

49 Holmes (2012a) gives a good overview of the history. He aptly describes an attribute as “any term that adequately completes the sentence ‘God is...’” (2012a:48). Sadly, he (2012a:65), having acknowledged that the attribute traditions have been “subject to a ‘perfect storm’” (2012a:64) over the past two hundred years, and that considering Jesus Christ as part of the internal history of God should lead to a redefinition of the attributes, still prefers to hold to the scholastic forebears.

The influence of post-Reformation *scholastic theology*, by separating the “what” question from the “who” question (see Beck 2016:196-204), and by prioritising the One God over the Triune God is pervasive. The formalisation of this approach was already present in the Belgic Confession. A theologian such as the South African Heyns (1992:40, 113), in his last book, an introduction to Dogmatics based on this confession, discusses the attributes in article 1 and the Trinity in article 8 – seventy pages further in the book. The “who” and “what” questions are not integrated.⁵⁰

With *Schleiermacher*, one encounters a revolutionary change in his *Christian faith* (2016). He locates his discussion in three places throughout the work (§§ 50-56, 79-85, 164-169) and correlates the attributes with various experiences – of a general religious consciousness of the relationship between God and world (eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience); of a consciousness of sin (holiness, justice, mercy), and of a consciousness of redemption (love and wisdom). His approach raises many questions. What is the referent in this instance? Is it still in some way the being of God, or are the attributes mere cyphers for human experiences of divine causality?⁵¹ They are definitely not expressions of the divine triune reality, as only sections §§170-172 focus on this doctrine.

With *Barth*, one comes across a major innovation with regard to an exposition of the attributes. This was indicated earlier in section 3.1.1, with the description of his contribution to trinitarian development. One can merely mention his achievement. The positioning of the attributes, after attending to the trinitarian identification of God, and the consistent rethinking thereof should be considered one of the major developments in the doctrine of God. Furthermore, his pairing of attributes dialectically reinforces the understanding of the complexity of describing divine “perfections”. Finally, his creative emphasis on divine space and beauty is a particularly fine theological insight. Wise theologising should pay careful attention to Barth’s interpretation.

In this short section, it may be productive to refer to the particularly rich tradition of developing divine attributes in *Dutch Calvinistic theology* and in *Dutch philosophy of religion*. The dogmatist *H. Berkhof* (1993:121-149) submits an excellent and attractive proposal developed from the perspective of the encounter (“ontmoeting”) and grouped dialectically:

50 Recently, a somewhat idiosyncratic approach is found in the 2-volume *Systematic Theology* by Sonderegger. In volume 1 (2015), she discusses omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience at length. In volume 2 (2020), she submits her detailed trinitarian theology and links holiness thereto.

51 For a discussion of the problematic with source referencing, see Venter (2019:2).

God is viewed in terms of “heilige liefde”, “weerloze overmacht”, and “veranderbare trouw”.⁵² The *Utrecht School* of Philosophy of Religion, with Brümmer as mentor, published a major volume of essays re-imagining the attributes – *Hoe is uw naam?* (see Van den Brink & Sarot 1995a). The key for a reinterpretation is to be found in an explicit personalistic conceptualisation of the divine (Van den Brink & Sarot 1995b:20). The systematic theologian *Muis* (2016) published a major doctrine of God and applied a unique approach by departing from the Lord’s Prayer, and consequently focusing on notions such as love, holiness, righteousness, might, and eternity. In his extensive doctrine of God, the scholar *Van de Beek* (2017:203-221) surprises by giving a fairly truncated treatment of attributes before treating the Trinity and focusing merely on incomprehensibility and omnipotence. The strange role of the Trinity in twentieth-century Dutch theology cannot be missed. In a fascinating article, Van den Brink & Van Erp (2009) raised the question as to whether the Dutch theologians have not missed the trinitarian renaissance. In the outstanding Systematic Theology – *Christelijke Dogmatiek* (2012) – *Van den Brink*⁵³ & *Van der Kooij* redressed this weakness with two good chapters (namely, 3 and 4) on God. In this approach, the Trinity enjoys a primary place, and the attributes are treated in light thereof (see specifically 2012:139). They still find it necessary to classify transcendence and condescension.

Two trends in contemporary discourse should be mentioned. There are clearly two camps in the God discourse – those who are willing to re-imagine the divine and those who strongly defend traditional positions. This can be clearly observed in the continuing and unresolved debate on the *impassibility*⁵⁴ and *simplicity*⁵⁵ of God. For some, God and suffering are untenable and, despite the Rahner rule, God’s being is purely simple. For others, a consistent trinitarian conceptualization renders these attributes open for re-envisioning. This difference is most likely to persist in Christian thinking about the God being worshipped.

A second trend moves into a different direction – seeking descriptions that might express the unique life of the Christian God in categories relevant to new, maybe postmodern, sensibility. Two may be mentioned

52 Unfortunately, this is not a trinitarian approach. Great strides have been made to re-envision the attributes. Berkhof (1993:326) understands the doctrine of the Trinity as a concluding description and not as a fundamental optic, which finally impacted on this treatment of attributes.

53 Van den Brink, who established himself in several excellent articles, is thoroughly acquainted with the trinitarian discourse and is a solid thinker in this regard.

54 For a major text on this theme by well-known scholars, see Keating and White (2009).

55 See the introduction by Levering and Kalantzis (2019:411-417) to the discussion by various theologians on simplicity in *Modern Theology* (2019[35/3]).

– *hospitality*⁵⁶ and *gifting*.⁵⁷ These capture adequately what divine economy is about – action of sheer generosity to and embrace of the other. At the same time, the two notions interact easily with wider philosophical trends and social dilemmas.

In *future*, reflection on divine attribute would have to carefully consider the structural design of a doctrine of God. It is unlikely that one could argue for a treatment separate from a consistent trinitarian view. Ultimately, the “what” of divinity, to what extent that could be intimated, should be informed by the very identity of God, the “who” of God. It is obvious that divine life is totally “saturated” and one cannot truncate that in any way. A plethora of descriptions may be justified and required. What one ultimately identifies should obviously be adjudicated by a conversation between Scripture, tradition, and the horizon of time. The *critical question* would be: How should one speak in a trinitarian way under these specific current conditions? In the final chapter, some intimations will be given about some form of naming the present.

Recommended further reading

The recommendations focus on two volumes of essays that deal with various attributes, specifically with traditional and contemporary antennas, and on three explorations of trust, vulnerability, and love, respectively.

CHALAMET, C., MAZZOCCO, M. & VIAL, M. (EDS)

2018. Naming God today: Contemporary approaches to the divine attributes. Special theme issue of *Modern Theology* 34(3):320-491. <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12418>

McCORMACK, B.L. (ED.)

2008. *Engaging the doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant perspectives*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

REICHEL, H.

2017. The God who trusts. In: H. Springhart & G. Thomas (eds), *Risiko und vertrauten. Risk and trust* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt), pp. 23-36.

THOMAS, G.

2017. Divine disaster management: Cross and resurrection as an event of creative vulnerability. *Dialog* 56(4):373-381. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12357>

VANHOOPER, K.J.

2001. The love of God – Its place, meaning, and function in systematic theology. In: K.J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *Nothing greater, nothing better: Theological essays on the love of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), pp. 1-29.

56 The space accorded by a trinitarian thinker such as Kärkkäinen (2014:310-339) to hospitality is noteworthy.

57 The work by Webb (1996:139-158) could be mentioned in this regard. God is understood as Giver, Given, and Giving.

3.2.2 Hiddenness as the beginning of the knowledge of God

By assigning hiddenness a space in a doctrine of God carries with it basic considerations. On the one hand, it counters a hubris that speaking about the divine has been settled, as found in classical theism or in the relational paradigm, and, on the other, a resignation that speaking is not possible or no longer makes sense. In his excellent discussion of the hiddenness of God, Peterson (2005:208) perceptively refers to a “middle way” between hubris and atheism. Exploring the hiddenness of God could be a way to navigate options in the current horizon of engaging the divine. It is interesting to note that this thematics attracts a fair amount of attention from diverse disciplines; one finds extensive discussions in Philosophy of Religion,⁵⁸ Old Testament scholarship,⁵⁹ and Systematic Theology. It is also clear that some surplus of meaning is at play, in this instance; no simplistic interpretation is available. This brief section addresses the understanding of four systematic theologians.

Barth (1957:179-204)⁶⁰ situates his treatment of “hiddenness” as part of the knowledge of God. Knowledge of God *begins* with the knowledge of God’s hiddenness. It is important to note that he considers hiddenness a property of God. In the older dogmatics, it was coupled with the idea of the incomprehensibility of God (1957:184). Something fundamental is at stake, in this instance. Hiddenness wants to convey that God’s nature is not in the sphere of human power; one cannot comprehend God (1957:187). Strictly, “we do not really know what we are saying when we say ‘God’” (1957:189). This, however, does not render one silent. The hiddenness of God is the *terminus a quo* of one’s knowledge of God; the moment one confesses God’s hiddenness, one has begun to know God (1957:192). This is a statement about God, and only in a secondary sense, one of human incapacity. Hiddenness is the inconceivability of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (1957:197), and directs one to the revelation of God in which God does not dissolve God’s hiddenness, but makes himself apprehensible.

In his great work, *The God of Jesus Christ* (1983), *Kasper* submits an excellent exposition of hiddenness. His interpretation lies in the extension of *Barth* and *Rahner*; it conveys rich theological textures.

58 See the good treatment in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* – Howard-Snyder & Green (2022). The views of Schellenberg and Rea are particularly relevant. The context of interpretation is that of non-belief.

59 Brueggemann’s (1997:333-358) interpretation is exceedingly important. His interpretation focuses on YHWH as the “guarantor of order”.

60 All references in this paragraph will be to this text.

He also connects it to revelation: revelation is the revelation of the hiddenness of God (1983:124). The older dogmatic tradition emphasised the incomprehensibility of God and one encounters a twofold narrowing, in this instance: the focus is on epistemology and on human inability to understand God, and one finds a reference to mysteries in the plural, and not an emphasis on the one mystery of God's salvation (1983:126). Kasper (1983:128) links the interpretation of hiddenness to *mystery* and makes three crucial points. First, it refers to something *theological* and not epistemic. It is about the revelation of *God's* mystery, and it enables one to speak. Secondly, it is about the revelation of the mystery of God's free self-communication in *love*. Ultimately, hiddenness is a theology of the cross (1983:129). Thirdly, the revelation of God's mystery is a message of the mystery of one's *salvation*. The constituting elements of Kasper's interpretation are clear: It is about God: God's revelation, the mystery of God's love, and one's salvation. The trinitarian profession of faith is the "concrete exposition of the hiddenness of God" (1983:128).

Jenson (2000:9) developed a captivating interpretation of hiddenness, which he connects explicitly to the Trinity – "the locus of God's hiddenness is the very substance of all trinitarian teaching". Hiddenness is not to be understood in terms of human epistemic weakness or God's ontological uniqueness, but in terms of God's impenetrable reality as moral agent. It is a root error to view God's hiddenness as metaphysical distance; the exact opposite is rather true: God is hidden by his offensive availability (1997:233). It is not that God holds something back from one; but that one cannot keep up with God: "it is that we cannot at any moment of his life with us fully understand what he is up to next" (1997:233). *Jenson* finally explains hiddenness with reference to each one of the triune Persons, and this is extremely crucial. For *Jenson* (2000:7), a divine attribute is properly construed when the different roles of each divine identity is told with regard to this aspect of their mutual life. Because the Father is the ultimate Source, theodicy is finally impossible; his ways will remain unsearchable. In light of Jesus' cross, the real God has the face of a suffering servant; God will always come in suffering and rejection. Any other way will amount to idolatry. As God's own future, the Spirit frees God "to surprise Himself" (1997:12) and involves one in a play of infinite freedom.

With *Tracy's* interpretation, one meets innovative ideas and novel directions. His view combines several strands of thinking: the turn to the face of the other by Levinas; the critique of modernity's violence; the twofold notion of hiddenness by Luther, and the Gospel of Mark's view of God and history. *Tracy* incorporates the "turn to the other" seriously. God reveals Godself in hiddenness, in the cross, and in negativity, and

especially in the suffering of the marginalised. The hidden God is the “*deus crucifixus*, the crucified God” (Tracy 1996:9). Tracy’s contribution is that the hiddenness should be rendered in historical-political terms (1996:9, 13). The categories of otherness, difference and marginality are important for him. A second unique emphasis in Tracy’s approach is borrowed from Luther: there is a radical form of hiddenness beyond the Word of the cross, which can only be signified by the metaphors of abyss, chasm, chaos, and horror (1996:10). This radical form of hiddenness is part of the biblical portrait and of human experience. Tracy aligns himself with a Marcan view of history: God is genuinely present through absence (1996:14) and is disclosed as the God of life in conflict, struggle, and suffering.

These few interpretations demonstrate the importance of the notion “hiddenness”, but also what reservoir of meaning it encompasses. In future, theology will inescapably have to listen to the rich interpretations and continue making sense of these in each new horizon. The reality of the divine meets one as an inexhaustible source of meaning.

Recommended further reading

Various interpretations are represented by the recommendations: positions from Philosophy of Religion, from the Old Testament, and from major individual thinkers from the Reformation to the twentieth century.

GERICKE, J.

2015. A comparative-philosophical perspective on divine hiddenness in the Hebrew Bible. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36(1), Art. #1400, 8 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v36i1.1400>.

GERRISH, B.A.

1973. “To the unknown God”: Luther and Calvin on the hiddenness of God. *The Journal of Religion* 53(3):263-292. <https://doi.org/10.1086/486347>

HOLMES, C.R.J.

2006. Disclosure without reservation: Re-evaluating divine hiddenness. *Neues Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 48:367-380. (Note – On Jüngel). <https://doi.org/10.1515/nzst.2006.48.3.367>

NORMAN, M.

2019. Luther, Heidegger, and the hiddenness of God. *Tyndale Bulletin* 70(2):291-316. <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.27726>

REA, M.C.

2018. *The hiddenness of God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198826019.001.0001>

3.2.3 Is there justice in the Trinity?

The *key interest* of this section is the question of how to think justice in the most fundamental way possible, in order to make it socially productive. The *argument* to be developed will attempt at making justice inherent to the nature of Ultimacy, or, in a specific Christian sense, to the character of the triune God. The first part of the argument will pursue a brief and cursory genealogy of the Christian concept of God, beginning in the Old Testament and moving to the articulation of a trinitarian exploration from the perspective of justice. The focus will be on developing a proposal to think divinity in a Christian sense in terms of justice. The final part of the argument will intimate some implications of a trinitarian approach for understanding justice. This section aims to retrieve justice as primary cypher to speak the Christian God; to rethink justice along relational lines, and to highlight the socio-ethical function of the attribute tradition.

Justice is a central theme in *Old Testament religion*, especially in the later strata of the tradition. Texts such as Isaiah 61:8 (“For I, the LORD, love justice”) and Psalm 89:14 (“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne”) point clearly in this direction. C. Wright (2004:258) summarises this well:

... for Israel the whole idea of justice was wrapped up with the qualities and characteristics of the LORD, their God

One remarkable text should be referred to, namely Psalm 82. Two crucial insights should be mentioned. This Psalm answers the question as to what “constitutes ‘godness’” (Brueggemann 1997:143) and about the importance of justice in society. Miller’s discussion is worth noting. According to his reading (Miller 1986:4), “justice is the cornerstone of the universe” and “justice is the issue on which the very claims of deity are settled”. These comments obviously have far-reaching ramifications for systematic theological thinking of the nature of Ultimacy, of the divine. Divinity as such should be construed in terms of justice.⁶¹ Not only is justice *central* in Israel’s theological imagination; it is also informed by a conspicuous *concrete* social antenna. God’s justice is directed to the material conditions of the stranger, the widow, the orphan, and the poor; Wolterstorff (2013:77) refers to the “quartet of the vulnerable”.⁶² Two additional connotations should also be mentioned: Old Testament

61 See also Moltmann’s discussion (2010:117-126) of this Psalm.

62 For a good discussion of the material situation of these groups, see Jacobson (2010).

social ethics could hardly be thought of without an *imitatio Dei* dynamic.⁶³ The character of the divine is the ultimate source of the moral order. The second connotation is crucial for the link with the New Testament: *salvation*. Especially in Deutero-Isaiah (see especially chapter 46:12-13), the mediation of God's justice is experienced as salvation.⁶⁴

When engaging the *New Testament* world and traditions, one has no difficulty in encountering a similar sensitivity to social justice. Especially in Matthew and Revelation, justice is valued as central virtue. One can only think of the beatitudes, for example Matthew 5:10, which conveys blessings to those who are persecuted for the sake of justice.⁶⁵ Matthew 25:31-46 can rightly be called the "grand charter for doing justice" (Wolterstorff 2013:102). The book of Revelation is an impressive re-imagining of power amidst pervasive Roman injustice. Utilising the throne as central symbol, the author envisions an alternative symbolic world. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991:117) is correct when stating that "Revelation's central problem and topic is the issue of power and justice." The intellectual question when reading the New Testament is not whether justice is prominent, but whether a major thinker such as Paul has not shifted the focus of the Old Testament, especially in the letter to the Romans. Has a social orientation not been eclipsed by a metaphysical occupation situating the individual struggling with "an introspective conscience"⁶⁶ to the centre? At stake is obviously the long and immensely intricate history of interpretation of both the Letter to the Romans and the concept of "dikaiosynē", and the actual effect thereof (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). Waetjen (2012:198), for example, critiques Reformational interpretations, as they have a specific result: "a gospel of individual salvation without commitment to the actualization of God's justice".⁶⁷

To interpret *Paul* as not superseding or eclipsing but rather as radicalising Old Testament sentiments, one should undertake at least two reading strategies: contextualising Romans and relaxing a consistent and exclusive forensic thrust. Both these lenses do have some respectable proponents. In his theology of Romans, Haacker (2003:116-124) emphasises the Roman understanding of righteousness as background to the letter: "the peculiar emphasis on righteousness in Paul's letter to

63 For a balanced treatment of the problems involved with such an approach, as well as the fruitfulness, see Barton (2007).

64 For a discussion, see Feldmeier & Spieckermann (2011:291).

65 For a thought-out discussion, situating dikaiosynē contra competing understandings of the time and considering it the new ethos of the household of God's kingdom, see Crosby (2005:100-118).

66 The memorable phrase by Stendahl (see his seminal article 1976:78-96).

67 His targets are punitive notions of the divine and understandings of righteousness as imputation.

the Romans cannot be haphazard". A de-contextualised interpretation of *dikaiosynē* would not be possible. The polemical thrust of notions such as "impartiality" and "peace" should be noted. Haacker (2003:124) observes that one of the rare instances of "kingdom of God" in Romans 14:17 is not without reason connected to "righteousness, peace and joy". Such a reading of Romans de-stabilises an a-historical interpretation of righteousness/justice. The well-known Pauline scholar Sanders (1991:74) is of the opinion that "the deeper levels of Paul's thought are not found in the juridical categories". He believes that another mode of thinking takes place, namely "participation in a new being". This participation in Christ produces real transformation.⁶⁸ The work by N.T. Wright is also important in this regard. He acknowledges that there is no word in English that adequately translates the relational aspects of *dikaiosynē* with its juridical overtones. In this instance, Wright (2013:801) identifies a "web of meaning", comprising the law court, covenant, and cosmic eschatology. Important in his detailed and multi-levelled interpretation is the view that *dikaiosynē* is "an attribute of God himself", "an attribute of covenant faithfulness" (2013:804). The fundamental question, for the present argument, is: What kind of *image of God* crystallizes in the Letter to the Romans? Is it one that stands in some continuity with the Old Testament with regard to justice? In a construal such as this, one could obviously follow various approaches. In her comprehensive study, Bassler (1982) highlights the notion of *impartiality*. Hays (2002:124) emphasizes the *narrative structure* of the God of Romans, which amounts to "an epistemological revolution" (2002:125). Despite a magnificent discussion, one cannot escape the impression that something is amiss in his treatment – a specific framing of the question: What does the prominence of *dikaiosynē* imply for the *very nature of God self*?

Two Lutheran systematic theologians – *Jenson and Jüngel* – may be of some assistance to take the argument further than mere covenantal thinking. Jenson (1995a:426) raises the pertinent question: "Why is God himself righteousness? What is the actuality of God's own righteousness?" As trinitarian thinker, Jenson (1995a:425) identifies patrological, Christological, and pneumatological dimensions: The Father "sets" righteousness; Jesus Christ is the "event" of righteousness, and the Spirit is the "movement" of righteousness. Jenson understands righteousness as "the underived event of communal faithfulness in God"; it "occurs in God" as *perichoresis* (1995a:426, 427). *This is the critical point.* Jüngel

68 For a succinct discussion, see Sanders (1991:74-76) who gives six reasons why he believes a participation mode of thinking should be preferred to a legal one.

(1999:35) thinks along similar lines. God is a “Trinitarian community of reciprocal otherness” and emphasises that

[t]his is the decisive viewpoint from which to consider God’s righteousness: God does not exist in splendid isolation as a solitary being, but in God otherness is affirmed. (1999:35).

The important insight, in this instance, is that God is righteousness in God’s being as triune, as affirmation of *reciprocal otherness*. On this basis, God communicates this *ad extra*, making others also righteous. Jüngel’s relational mode of thinking should not escape notice: sin is relationlessness, and salvation entails the establishing of “new relations, new life-connections” (1999:38).

The train of thought expressed by Jenson and Jüngel is also found in the work of the philosopher *Wolterstorff*. His views are important, as he not only engages a wide scope of contemporary discourses on justice, but prioritises social justice, and explicitly advocates a “theistic grounding of justice”. He is critical of justice as right order, a view found in the seminal work by Rawls – *A theory of justice* – and he proposes an alternative conception: justice as natural rights based on human worth:

The theory of claim-rights that I have articulated is an inherent rights theory; I hold that it is on account of our worth, our dignity, that we have rights (Wolterstorff 2013:121).

This theory of rights is based on the distinction between *primary justice* and reactive/rectifying justice (see 2008:71; 2013:22). This worth is grounded in God’s love for human beings – “What does ground human rights ... God’s love for each and every one of God’s human creatures (2013:137; see also 2008:360). Wolterstorff’s essay (2006) in the Moltmann Festschrift – “Is there justice in the Trinity?” – is of relevance to the present argument. Basic to this view is that rights are *social* (2006:184; 2008:286; 2013:44). His notion of *primary justice* is axiomatic to arguing for justice in the Trinity: the way persons treat one another with due respect for their worth. With this framework as background, he concludes:

Not only is there justice in the relation of the persons of the Trinity to each other, justice in their relationship is caught up within love for each other (2006:187).

Love as attachment and love as acknowledgement of worth of the other are both to be found in the Trinity; thus, justice is “a constituent of love within the Trinity”. He does not hesitate to refer to human beings called to

reflect the life of the Trinity; see, for example: “We mirror the inner life of the Trinity” 2006:187; also 178).

The brief discussion of the three trajectories conveys an impression that it is *possible* to think *justice and God* in a Christian construction of divine identity in an intimate manner; there are ample resources available for that. In the genealogical journey, justice could be found as central to the nature of the divine, and there are subsequent attempts to radicalise the association that culminates in thinking of the being of God in terms of justice. A thorough and systematic exploration of this relationship between God and justice will have to be situated in the long tradition of divine attributes. It remains an outstanding task to retrieve justice as central to God’s being and to re-construct this in a consistent, trinitarian manner. At least two tasks need to be completed in a project of this nature: to think attributes along relational lines, and to explore the ethical ramifications of such a vision. If the identity of the Christian God is relational, such an optic in the treatment of the attributes becomes the hermeneutical key.⁶⁹ One’s naming of the attributes is not epistemologically neutral; the theologian makes choices. What is emphasized and what is marginalized or even neglected mask values and interests. The construction of a theology of the attributes does not only require intricate theological discernment, but also sociopolitical responsibility.⁷⁰

A *trinitarian re-imagining of justice* will prioritise sociality as key to understanding justice. Justice is a quality of social relations. Such an understanding will consciously attempt to de-privatise, or even de-interiorise justice. The intellectual framework for thinking justice is not primarily a legal one, but rather a relational one. The trinitarian confession provides theologically a much fruitful and productive key for conceptualising this. In the so-called trinitarian renaissance of the last half a century, a host of central motifs emerged, for example, mutuality, gifting, hospitality. These terms all try to convey something of the exceptional quality of the relationship of the three divine persons in their equality, unity, and otherness. A trinitarian re-envisioning of justice could employ this promising scholarship.

69 The work by Krötke (2001) – *Gottes Klarheiten* – should be mentioned. God’s self-relatedness forms the basis for the doctrine of the divine attributes. As God is an event of relatedness, the attributes should be understood as “concretisations” of this relation to the self. “Glory” plays an important role in his entire attribute theology; it represents the relationally rich reality of God. For a discussion of this aspect of Krötke’s work, see Holmes (2007:162-165).

70 Power and Downey (2012:53) are aware of this. They correctly refer to “Naming God as an ethical project”.

Although a trinitarian imagination has virtually an *inexhaustible hermeneutical potential* to make sense of intellectual challenges and questions, much will depend on *how* one understands the approach. The previous insight about sociality relies on an argumentative move based on the immanent Trinity. A rich array of interpretative associations comes to the fore when one uses the traditional doctrine of *appropriations*. For example, a *patrological* perspective will shed light on *otherness*; the Father provides the fecund foundation for the possibility of *alterity*, and constitutes an ontological basis for this in creation. A *Christological* view could open vast possibilities to think *materiality*, *narrativity*, and *dialectic* in light of the incarnation, the story of his earthly life, and the event of the cross/resurrection that could lend much texture to any treatment of justice. A *pneumatological* exploration could highlight *agency* and the reality of a *novum* amidst historical hopelessness. These suggestions obviously require further explanation. Suffice it to suggest that a trinitarian approach could generate meaningful avenues to understanding justice in a Christian sense.

A consistent trinitarian understanding of justice creates the possibility of a full and *coherent Christian theology* of this most important social and existential yearning. Imagining the life of the divine in terms of justice, opens avenues for thinking the moral order in *ontological* terms as well as the *character* thereof. Justice belongs to the fabric of being and is fundamentally a relational reality. At the same time, a trinitarian view conveys *hope* for the righting of injustice and the ultimate rehabilitation of victims and the innocent; it provides a powerful motivation and direction for human moral action.

Recommended further reading

The recommendations entail a detailed discussion of the fascinating Psalm 82, a general systematic discussion of “justice” as attribute, and various interpretations of how thinking about the divine and justice could be construed.

JOHNSON, E.A.

2010. Female symbols for God: The apophatic tradition and social justice. *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 1(2):40-57.

KEVERN, J.R.

1997. The Trinity and social justice. *Anglican Theological Review* 79(1):45-54.

MOBERLY, R.W.K.

2020. The just God: The nature of deity in Psalm 82. In: Idem., *The God of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), pp. 93-123.

MUIS, J.

2018. The justice of God. *Modern Theology* 34(3):356-367. <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12422>

VAN WYK, T.

2019. Redressing the past, doing justice in the present: Necessary paradoxes. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(4), a5625. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i4.5625>.

3.2.4 Narrativity and a biography of the divine as character

A radical question arises as to whether one should not investigate an alternative to the attribute tradition for assigning descriptive qualities to the divine, a less reductionist, essentialist, and a-historical approach. If the God encountered in the Bible is an active Agent, a Person in a great drama, one candidate for such an alternative approach could be characterised as part of narrativity. In the state of scholarship, one finds intimations of such a method. One fascinating example will be given, in this instance, by way of an extended summary. The rationale for this inclusion is multiple: it simultaneously showcases a narrative character approach and re-emphasises the plurality of representation in Scripture and the often-problematic nature of the profile(s) drawn.

Jack Miles' Pulitzer prize-winning work, *God: A biography* (1996) can be predicated in divergent ways: imaginative, courageous, novel, blasphemous. Whatever the verdict, the approach followed and the conclusions drawn linger long after one has read the book and pose a challenge not easily dismissed. God is studied as a character, the protagonist of a classic of world literature. By reading the Bible as literature and God as major character, one encounters an approach different from the typical dogmatic attribute tradition one. The author made one crucial decision that ultimately influenced the final portrayal: the text of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) is used, thus placing the prophetic corpus before the so-called writings, and not the Old Testament with its well-known order of torah-writings-prophets. This changed order of the books ultimately has far-reaching implications for the character of God. As part of his method, Miles follows a sequential reading of the Hebrew Bible, which allows for the detection of character development, as well as apparent conflicts and contradictions. He is interested in the effect of the whole Tanakh on the reader, which he unsettlingly achieves.⁷¹ To write a *biography of God* in

71 Groothuis' review evidences this. He opines that a "misnomer is an understatement" for labelling the book!

this way neither requires God to be an extra-literary character, nor does it require or preclude faith.

It is not possible to summarise the nuances and subtleties of Miles' interpretation and argumentation for claims made. Only a few of the more prominent perspectives can be conveyed in this instance. The books of Genesis and Exodus portray God's "childhood"; the book of Isaiah, the middle years. The turning point is reached by Job, and the final years are described by books such as Esther, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah.

- The *creation* of humankind in the image of God is the plot that drives the narrative. The story of God's life is the story of his life work. The quest for a self-image, the sole stated motivation for the creation, is God's indispensable tool for self-understanding. At the beginning of the Bible, God does not know who he⁷² is. His only way of knowing himself is through mankind as an image of himself (Miles 1996:187).⁷³ The protagonist receives his life story from the antagonist. God comes to full self-consciousness only after a tumultuous history.
- The *flood story* reveals "the deepest of all fault lines in the divine character" – he could be an outright destroyer (1996:42). This action proves that the creator has the capacity to destroy and renders him dangerously unpredictable.
- Miles returns time and again to the divine ambivalence towards human *sexual fertility*, and points out how the narrative – especially in the first few books – is obsessed with reproduction as the image of divine creativity. The covenant with Abraham and circumcision are placed in this interpretive context and understood as the surrender of generative autonomy (1996:90, 101).
- The *Exodus* and the conquest of the land profoundly change God's identity. He is drawn into battle; war transforms him, and he becomes a permanent divine warrior (1996:92). The Baal element, although desexualised, dominates in God's life at this moment (1996:189).
- *Deuteronomy* stabilises God's character to some extent and synthesises the elements of the portrait up to this stage: God as creator, destroyer, warrior, lawgiver, and the God who can enter into a personal relationship. According to Miles, this is the God, who has remained God for Christians and Jews up to modern times, but who was also rejected by Western atheism (1996:141).

72 Pronoun conventions by Miles are followed.

73 All references in the text will be to Miles' book (1996).

- The establishment of the *monarchy* causes a fateful change in God's self-understanding: he starts to refer to himself as *Father* of the king (1996:168). This will allow him to escape from the dilemma in which the covenant with Israel has placed him. He cannot change the covenant, but he can change himself (1996:172). This change happens concurrently with a concern on his part for the poor and the needy that will become more prominent during the exile.
- "The new Lord God" emerges in the *Book of Isaiah* and it presents a massive synthesis of divine personalities (1996:203). The exile allows God to emerge as international arbiter, a role which he has hitherto not assumed to this extent. Especially in Deutero-Isaiah, one encounters a "miraculous benignity" (1996:213), an adoption of a tone of tender, almost maternal solicitude that is without precedent (1996:220). Up to this stage, the notion of *comfort* has never figured in connection with God. Miles is emphatic that God has never loved until this point in history (1996:237). God was previously wrathful, vengeful, and remorseful, but the Bible, from Genesis through 2 Kings, is silent about joy, happiness, or pleasure. A clear emotional evolution has taken place in the life of the protagonist. In addition to these perspectives, his uniqueness is exceptionally emphasised: he is the one and only God. The source of this feature is not so much his power than his mystery. God's unknowability is the central novelty in the Book of Isaiah (1996:226) and is a way to escape the all-too-imprisoning clarity of Deuteronomy. Mystery opens the door to novelty. The underlying question of the exile – Is a new start possible? – finds an answer in the mysteriousness of God (1996:228). Incomprehensibility is a feature introduced into the idea of God under a particular set of circumstances (1996:235). The juxtaposition of the notions of benignity and mystery has remained the defining incongruity at the core of the word "God" as understood by the West, and Isaiah's role in creating this incongruity can scarcely be exaggerated (1996:236).
- As to the question whether a *Goddess* figure is to be recognized among the personalities that fuse in the character of God, Miles believes that one should think along the lines of deliberate exclusion rather than mere absence. The exclusion of Asherah is nothing less than a "violently emotional revulsion" (1996:265). The female in the divine male was suppressed far more thoroughly than the destroyer in God (1996:405).
- The *Book of Job* forms the climactic moment in the biography of God (1996:354) and his destructive and demonic side is brought to full consciousness (1996:303). For Miles, in his provocative and idiosyncratic interpretation, the book is about justice and power. The

voice in the whirlwind and the answer by Job should be understood as irony responding to sarcasm. God subsumes justice to his power, by refusing to address the question of justice and by only referring to his power. Job refuses to accept mere power as the criterion of moral integrity; “it is the simultaneity of justice and power that makes God God” (1996:315). Job’s response is a refusal to respond and withholds everything that can be withheld. Job has won, and the Lord has lost. After the encounter with Job, God never speaks again in the Tanakh. Job has reduced God to silence (1996:329).

What does the reading of the various books amount to überhaupt about God for Miles? The following conclusions can be gleaned from the book:

- The movement in the Tanakh is from activity through *speech to silence*: “The Lord God’s life in the Tanakh begins in activity and speech and ends in passivity and silence” (1996:402). After the response of Job, there is a long twilight of God, a long decrescendo to silence.
- The development is from an image of God the *creator* at the beginning to one of the *Ancient of Days* towards the end. One encounters God in Genesis with no history, no genealogy, no past, and no social and private life. The narrative is one great struggle of God with himself towards full self-consciousness and self-knowledge (1996:21). The course of the Lord God’s life runs from omnipotence to relative impotence, from ignorance to relative omniscience (1996:402). But why does the story end in silence? It seems as if the desire for a self-image carries a tragic potential: self-knowledge resulted in a loss of self-interest (1996:404).
- After the study, the *central insight* for Miles may be captured in the following words:

the most coherent way to imagine the Lord God of Israel is as the inclusion of the content of several ancient divine personalities in a single character (1996:72).

God is at once unity (one character) and multiplicity (different personalities). He is an amalgam of several personalities in one character (1996:6). One example illustrates this crucial insight of Miles; relatively early in the narrative, he raises the question as to what makes God Godlike; his answer (1996:93): creator (yahweh/elohim) + cosmic destroyer (Tiamat) + personal God (God of the fathers) + warrior (Baal) = God. All of these result in an impression of God being incongruent (1996:70), inherently unstable (1996:197), ambiguous (1996:328), and contradictory (1996:408). The Book of Job radically underscores this:

good and evil are to be found simultaneously in him (1996:327). The demonic strand, though never finally dominant, cannot be excised from his character (1996:333).

- “Nothing that once appears in God’s personality ever quite disappears” (1996:281). God will never not be a destroyer and never not be a warrior. The overwhelming impression is one of *anxiety and unpredictability*. The all-defining question is: When will the Lord God act, or will he ever act? (1996:402). God is finally friend and foe (1996:352).
- Read sequentially, one cannot escape to notice the definite retreat from demonstrated power to attributed power (1996:378). The Tanakh ends with the mind of God objectified in law, the action of God incarnated in leadership, and the voice of God transferred to prayer (1996:396).

Miles’ book was written in the form of one massive intercalation; the extended biography of God is bracketed by a concern about the self-image of the West. *Imitatio Dei* has always been the ideal of character building. The God of the Bible has been the mirror of the West.

While consciously emulating his virtues, the West has unconsciously assimilated the anxiety-inducing tension between his unity and his multiplicity (1996:6).

The divided interior life of God is the divided interior life of the West (1996:408).

Miles’ book is exceedingly important; one cannot question his creative and careful reading of texts. The total non-reception of his approach and findings by Systematic Theology tells a great deal about how the dynamics of truth and method functions. The moment a reading strategy changes, a new world crystallises. A conventional and non-pluralistic Systematic Theology requires a typical atomistic proof-texting approach; this can control and domesticate the divine. When the diversity of text types in the Bible is recognised as literature, exciting possibilities emerge to encounter profiles of the divine that may speak to our time with a fresh urgency and relevance. The engagement with Miles’ work, which is over twenty-five years old, is still a future task.

Recommended further reading

The work recommended represents two examples from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament, and one more fundamental reflection.

GERICKE, J.W.

2017. Metaphysical perspectives on YHWH as a fictional entity in the Hebrew Bible. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3), 4566. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4566>.

LASINE, S.

2016. Characterizing God in his/our own image. In: D.N. Fewell (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of biblical narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 465-477. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199967728.013.40>

MOORE, S.D.

1995. The beatific vision as a posing exhibition: Revelation's hypermasculine deity. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 60:27-55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X9601806002>

PATRICK, D.

1981. *The rendering of God in the Old Testament*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress.

TOLMIE, D.F.

1998. The characterization of God in the Fourth Gospel. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 69:57-75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X9802006903>

3.3 Where is God? Anxiety and divine action

In his seminal article, Duquoc (1992:4) asserts that the theological question is no longer "Who is God?" or "What is God?". Rather, the question is "Where is God?". Identity and essence issues have lost their relevance; the central issue is: Where does God act?⁷⁴ Conventionally, the matter is addressed by Systematic Theology in the doctrine of providence, and then often under the rubric of theodicy. In this instance, it is proposed that the *doctrine of God* should suggest some guidelines and direction in this regard. divine action, in light of its sheer urgency, is a constituent element of a theo-episteme.

The *background* to the question about divine action is fairly simple to profile. The occurrence of immense historic suffering and the achievements of science and technology have assigned any claim to divine presence and action to an embarrassingly obscure position. To make claims about divine perseverance and governance has become increasingly problematic. The

74 For Duquoc (1992:8), the issue is one of the "localization" of the divine and he suggests that the outcast has become a pointer to the presence of God, who "sets up his tent where all hope seems to have been abolished".

anxiety about *the eclipse of the divine* presence in our world has become a theological datum that warrants serious attention in any doctrine of God. It may have been a question in the life of faith all along. One encounters prominent traces of this struggle already in the Old Testament. This was noted in Miles' controversial work (1996). More work points to this fact. For example, Friedman (1995) talks about the "disappearance of God in the Bible". Recent scholarship has started to take this as a serious field of research.⁷⁵ During the twentieth century, this quest and this growing despondency about divine action have become acute. Only *five* seemingly disparate *trajectories* may be mentioned: post-Holocaust thought; the controversy on impassibility; the Divine Action Project; weak thought in Philosophy of Religion, and Covid theology. The Jewish thinker Jonas (1987:3, 6, 9) claims that Auschwitz has called the traditional concept of God into question. It is no longer possible to continue with a notion of divine omnipotence; there is only space for a suffering God. The work of the Christian theologian Moltmann, especially his *The crucified God* (1974), inaugurated a serious debate on divine suffering during World War 2. The critical fact to be borne in mind is Moltmann's own experience of suffering. In a totally different context – one of multi- and interdisciplinary dialogue between faith and science – the cardinal and problematic question of divine action became the focus of a major research project by Vatican Observatory and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley.⁷⁶ This Divine Action Project emphasised the importance of the issue of divine agency and the immense complex undertaking of addressing this. In yet another discourse – that of Continental Philosophy of Religion – one finds a farewell to the Omni God of traditional thought and of all attempts at theodicy; what remains are various proposals for a weak theology; at most, one can talk, in Caputo's words (2020:18), of the "subjunctive power" of God. There is a similar struggle in the emerging discourse on God and the pandemic. Oberg (2021:140) aptly refers to a "reduced idea of the divinity", or "enervating the divine". In all these discourses, there is no abandonment of God, but an intense occupation and anxiety to consider divine agency afresh in line with historical and social experience. Classical theism, with its uncritical and optimistic notions, sounds increasingly hollow.

Corresponding to an experience of a "silent God"⁷⁷ is, arguably, a *reconfigured self*, also long in the making. There are no direct encounters

75 See, for example, Melton (2018:13-20) on present scholarship in this regard.

76 For an excellent overview and discussion, see Wildman (2004).

77 See the major work by Korpel and De Moor (2012) on this theme.

with the divine; there are only persons “in search of God”.⁷⁸ Human beings have become increasingly naturalistic; engulfed by a closed universe. Thaumaturgical experiences have become obsolete; occurrences found a direct link between cause and effect. The frontier between this material natural work and a metaphysical one has closed. How the divine is present, how the divine works have become immeasurably obscured. This shift can be told in various narratives: it could be the story of the move from pre-modernity to modernity; it could be the story of the evolving self, from fear to optimism to cynicism.

The question is: How to think about divine action in our time, against the background indicated? In line with the intended format of the text, one cannot venture into a detailed exposition; *five signposts* for theological thinking should be identified.

- The struggle to gauge God’s presence in history in the Bible deserves greater attention. These *theologies of divine presence* and movement could become a major optic for thinking about action. The reality of these theologies and their *plurality* are already a significant datum.⁷⁹ In the New Testament, the Book of Revelation is an outstanding instance of sense-making that gives a glimpse of the sophisticated interpretation operative. Some-one sits on the throne (Rev. 4:3), and when the Lion of Judah should open the scroll, a slain Lamb (Rev. 5:5, 6) appears. The use of the apocalyptic form and of paradox, of the dialectic of suffering and the triumph of justice convey a sense of nuanced thinking.
- In traditional Systematic Theology, the action of God has been scattered over several *compartmentalised loci* – creation, providence, salvation, and eschatology. The question should be raised about a more *integrated dramatic approach*. Obviously, a large number of historically formed ideas acquired settled status, and aversion to others became ossified. The renewed interest in *creatio continua*, the viability of panentheism, and the placement of eschatology at the beginning of thinking deserve careful attention. The engagement of the Ultimate with reality cannot be domesticated in compartments of thought.
- The imperative of adequate and appropriate *categories of thinking* can hardly be stressed enough. To capture the presence and action of God,

78 In his fascinating book, Kugel (2017) explores this “great shift” already observed in the Bible: God no longer appears to people, telling them what to do; there are only people reaching out to a “distant God” in the later traditions.

79 For the diversity of interpretations of divine intervention in history, see, for example, Schmid (2019:327-350). One finds, for example, deuteronomistic, prophetic, and sapiential interpretations of history.

stretch human conceptualisation. Luther intuited this with his notion of *sub contrario specie*; Paul with his power in weakness. To think in terms of paradox, of irony, of fragment, of the subjunctive are all possibilities to deconstructing the theological propensity for mastery of the divine. The way one thinks and speaks should be commensurable to the subject matter one approaches with hesitation.

- Substantially, the way forward for making sense of divine action could be one of creative and consistent *trinitarian imagining*. Such an approach has the advantage of assembling the multiple Scriptural voices, and of establishing some form of coherence. The work of the Persons of the Trinity is both distinguished and in unison. In the traditional appropriation doctrine, the Father is associated with creation, the Son with salvation, and the Spirit with perfection. These should be interpreted in a hermeneutical account. Patrologically, one is justified to think in terms of sheer fecundity, of life, of meaning. Christologically, one is confronted with suffering, duration of death, and the promise of new life – a dialectic wrought through time. Pneumatologically, one is astounded by new and surprising possibilities of the future breaking into this life. The promise of a trinitarian approach is the profiling of a certain *direction* for thinking. There is a forward movement, an emergence in reality; a time for explicable darkness and the dawn of justice, and there is the possibility of a *novum*. A trinitarian understanding could potentially address some of the fundamental questions of life and engage with typical lines of thought in contemporary discourse. A trinitarian directionality does not provide simplistic answers. It creates space for affirming meaning in life, and for the evolution of life. It simultaneously confirms the inexplicability of suffering and of the overweight of justice. And it celebrates the power of the future.
- A trinitarian approach is accompanied by an explicit acknowledgement of the *intra-canonical plurality* of theologies. A full theology of divine action should attend to a host of motifs that are related to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. For example, the Old Testament notion of “blessing” has disappeared from Systematic Theology. Seldom does one come across a respectable treatment of the “will of God”, or the continued priestly work of the risen Lord, or the disruptive work of the Spirit.

Theological sense-making is a never-ending process. Discerning, naming the presence and the work of the triune God can never be captured in schemata. The very process of struggling to perceive, to interpret and to articulate is part of being human. At least, there are rudimentary maps that enable one to navigate.

Recommended further reading

The work recommended comprises two major monographs on divine providence and theodicy. The remaining three – by South Africans – focus on the Divine Action Project and the complexity to discern God’s work in history.

CONRADIE, E.M.

2010. *Lewend en kragtig: In gesprek oor ... God se handeling in die wêreld*. Wellington: Bybel-Media.

FERGUSON, D.

2018. *The providence of God: A polyphonic approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108683050>

SMIT, D.J.

2012. Trinity, history – and discernment? *NGTT* 53(3&4):337-352. <https://doi.org/10.5952/53-3-4-273>

SOUTHGATE, C.

2008. *The groaning of creation: God, evolution and the problem of evil*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.

TÖNSING, D.

2013. Cornel du Toit’s science and religion contribution in the lens of the Divine Action Project: The advantage of limited aims and epistemological diversity. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39(1):7-21.

4. THE TRINITY AS A WAY OF LIFE

4.1 Divine performance and a trinitarian self

In a theo-episteme, one should attend to the “fatal separations” of modernity, to which Tracy (2005b:47) refers, those between theory and practice, feeling and thought. The *fragmentation* of the disciplines, especially between Systematic Theology, Ethics and Spirituality, should converge in the doctrine of God. To recover the meaning of the Trinity for the life of faith, Lacugna (1991a:1) justifiably refers to it as “ultimately a practical doctrine”. That was also Rahner’s main motivation for formulating his axiom. The work of the great scholar of Greek philosophy Hadot (see, for example, 2002:55-233) has been most influential in contemporary thought, especially his key insight that ancient philosophy was finally a “way of life”. This idea should be embraced and developed in Systematic Theology and in the treatment of a doctrine of God. One way of doing so is to address the issue raised by Kaufman (1993:301-321) about the “function of the symbol ‘God’”.⁸⁰

The basic contention, in this instance, is that one should think in terms of *performance*. When believing in God, when developing a doctrine of God, one is doing something; but even more crucial: there is something reciprocal. God is affecting us. Visions of the divine do function, they perform. This can be studied in many ways. Three can be referred to and a fourth will be explained as the preferred approach. *The first approach* is that one can study the functions of religion as such. The discipline of Religion Studies abounds with proposals as to why people are religious and what potential effect that may have on human society.⁸¹ *A second approach* is often found in psychology or political theory – a study of the impact of God images.⁸² Often, these could be fairly pathological. *A third approach* does come closer to the focus of this study – the Trinity itself – and raises the question about the way it functions in discourses. The specific function carries with it particular effects. If one emphasizes the agency of the Trinity, one could think of grace being extended and the consequence would be comfort. If one highlights the mimetic function of the Trinity, the consequence could be a relational one, as has been

80 Kaufman (1993:306, 309, 315) points out that the symbol of God provides a focus for human consciousness, devotion, and activity. His own project focuses on constructing a new conception of God that resonates with the modern experience and understanding of the world, and that he finds in a concept “of the humanizing and relativizing God”.

81 In this highly developed field, only one overview may be referred to, namely Pals (2021), who discusses influential views such as those by Durkheim and Geertz.

82 Nicholls’ (1989) study on the political effects of God images is fairly well-known in this regard.

argued in social trinitarianism. This third approach is important, and the various functions should be identified. This is part of doing trinitarian theology. In this section, a *fourth possible approach* will be suggested and eventually be followed: divine performance as *self-formation*. A particular representation of the divine has as a consequence that a corresponding human self is nurtured and formed.

The notion of the human *self* has become a fruitful category to employ in thinking. The sociologist Joas (2013:146) credits William James for the shift from soul to self. One cannot refer to the notion of self, without alluding to the magisterial work by the philosopher Taylor (1989) – *Sources of the self* – on the long making of modern Western identity.⁸³ At present, the study of the human self has become a fascinating and burgeoning field of research.⁸⁴ Inevitably, the theologian should raise the question: What self is being formed by a trinitarian rendering of the divine?

The bridge or connecting point between the triune God and the believing community is arguably provided by the sacrament of *baptism*. An identity is conferred to the child or the believer. Butin (2001:3) insightfully started his short book on the Trinity with a discussion of baptism and considered the triune formula as “performative words”. Baptism is a rite of identity establishment: “The words of my baptism tell me *who* I am by telling me *Whose* I am” (2001:3). To unpack that identity could move in various directions; all would depend on one’s trinitarian theology. A particularly wide spectrum of associations is evoked the moment one is set to identify contours of a possible emerging trinitarian self. A rich dramatic narrative comes into focus of the action of the triune God and a host of motifs generated by biblical and patristic traditions. Only *ten* possible *cyphers* could be mentioned that may function for delineating a baptismal identity. The trinitarian self is a/an -

- *Thinking* self – the identity of the triune God was born in a history of intense debate and argumentation.
- *Relational* self – the one God is a community of three Persons.
- *Faithful* self – the God of the Covenant was especially honoured by Israel for faithfulness to promises.
- *Anxious* self – the counter-traditions of the Old Testament and the hiddenness of God resist any domestication.

83 Taylor identifies three elements: inwardness, the affirmation of ordinary life, and nature as moral source.

84 See the interesting work by Elliott (2020) on the various concepts of the self – for example postmodern, algorithmic, and mobile selves.

- *Dialectical* self – the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ manifest the most radical dialectic ever seen, that between death and life.
- *Kenotic* self – the self-giving of the triune God exemplifies this amply.
- *Carnal* self – the incarnation, the bodily assumption of Jesus Christ, elevated materiality against all cultural degradation.
- *Hopeful* self – the Spirit as eschatological gift continuously opens new horizons for agency amidst trauma and despondency.
- *Evolving* self – the possibility of forgiveness and the promise of the ultimate establishment of justice keep life essentially open.
- *Worshipping* self – the triune God is worthy of adoration.

Each one of these elements could obviously be argued and supported by extensive source referencing. Most, if not all of these elements are self-evident and form part of rudimentary trinitarian theology. The specific point is that the confession of the trinitarian doctrine furnishes an immense rich corpus of ideas that could be developed into a *textured notion* of the self; a notion born from Scriptural and theological tradition. Furthermore, in a multidisciplinary engagement with secular disciplines, a trinitarian contribution would not embarrassingly retreat into insularity. A trinitarian self could, by virtue of its Ultimate Source, embody or exemplify a self deeply centred in a world of tragic disorientation.

The *ethical dimension* inherent in this task of thinking the self before the divine should be stressed. Constructing a doctrine of God is a thorough-going ethical task, because of its performative function. Several studies have been done on the rise of atheism and the contributing factors of specific (distorted) conceptualisations of the divine. Kasper (1983:315) concludes his great study on God with the hope that the trinitarian confession would be the answer to modern atheism, asserting that the triune God is the “definitive determination of the indeterminate openness of man”. The fundamental question is: How is that triune identity interpreted? It is unlikely to continue with a claim of the centrality, for example, of the omni-tradition, as Sonderegger (2015) does. The next two sections will explore two of the elements – the ethical and the mystical. The choice for this decision is mainly based on the prominence given to these in contemporary trinitarian scholarship.

Recommended further reading

In the following list, two general studies on the notion of a “way of life” are recommended, one investigation on the idea of the Trinity as a practical doctrine and then, finally, two on the ethical implications of God images and on the multiple ways in which the Trinity could be employed discursively.

NEDER, A.

2019. *Theology as a way of life: On teaching and learning the Christian faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

SHARPE, M. & URE, M.

2021. *Philosophy as a way of life: History, dimensions, directions*. London: Bloomsbury. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350102170>

SIGURDSON, O.

2005. Is the Trinity a practical doctrine? In: W.G. Jeanrond & A. Lande (eds), *The concept of God in global dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), pp. 115-125.

VENTER, R.

2008. God images, ethical effects, and the responsibility of Systematic Theology. *Acta Theologica* 28(2):146-164. <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v28i2.48889>

2010 Doing trinitarian theology: Primary references to God and imagination. *In die Skriflig* 44(3&4):565-579. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v44i3/4.162>

4.2 The Trinity and an ethical self

One of the primary reasons for the enthusiasm for the Trinity since the 1970s is the link established between a social interpretation of God and the concrete ethical life. The notion of a theonomous ethic is very old and many studies have investigated the relation between God and morality.⁸⁵ To approach the ethical as such, explicitly from a trinitarian perspective, is of fairly recent interest. The theologian Cunningham could be mentioned in this regard. In his major trinitarian work (1998b:3), Cunningham is particularly interested in trinitarian “practices”: “The doctrine of the Trinity becomes meaningful only in the context of Christian practices.” In his ethics (2008:167), he gives a clear space to the Trinity; of value, in this instance, is his notion of “trinitarian virtues”; these are “dispositions that God has by nature, and in which human beings can participate by grace”. He (2008:269) identifies three such virtues – faithfulness, peaceableness, and courage. A trinitarian-oriented ethic, especially one informed by a social or relational paradigm, succeeds more effectively in bridging the divide between confession and life than a classical theistic one. Much of

85 One can refer to two excellent recent volumes exploring this problematic – Banner & Torrance (2006), and Renaud & Daniel (2018).

the enthusiastic embracing of social trinitarianism has been based on a form of *mimesis*. One gets the impression that God, as example to be imitated or “echoed”, is a powerful avenue into linking God and life. Obvious banal and crude analogies could be claimed and should be questioned. In the trinitarian scholarship, one also finds nuanced arguments that have enduring value. Two proponents will be briefly described, namely Gunton and Volf. Their visions transpose the human self from a privatized sphere to a social public space with their specific emphases.

Colin Gunton (1941-2003) had a clear understanding of the task of theology (1997:7). It is the enterprise that seeks to express conceptually the being of God and then the implications for human life. The Trinity was about life (2003:11) – “life before God, with one another and in the world”. The fragmentation of modern culture was of particular concern for the late Gunton in his work *The One, the Three and the Many* (1993). This outstanding work⁸⁶ offers a theological account of the shape and failure of modernity. The emergence of this cultural epoch has resulted in deficient notions and practices with regard to relationality, particularity, temporality, and truth (p. 123). The relentless pressure for homogeneity is the real threat of modernity (p. 39). The rights of the many are subverted by new and demonic versions of the one: either the many become an aggregate of one, or the many become homogenised (p. 33). The predicament of modernity is directly related to the displacement of the Christian God, according to Gunton (p. 38): “My contention is that the distinctive failures of our era derive from its failure of due relatedness to God.” Traditional theism shares the blame for the emergence of modernity. The prime culprit is Christian theology’s tendency towards a monolithic concept of God. Understanding God as single, simple, and unchanging contributes to the rebellion of the many against the repressive one. Trinity and creation become the foci of his theological project. The idea of “open transcendental” is central in his argument; it is a notion basic to the human thinking process that enables the exploration of the universal marks of being (p. 142). Gunton responds to the perceived crisis with a specific understanding of God: a trinitarian God functions as an idea that generates transcendentals. The underlying assumption is that all of creation reflects the being of God, the source of meaning and truth (p. 145). The concept *perichoresis* emerges, in this instance, as crucial: the one and the many in dynamic interrelations: “God is what he is by virtue of the dynamic relatedness of Father, Son, and Spirit” (p. 165). This notion of relatedness safeguards particularity as persons are constituting each other, making each other what they are

86 The rest of the references in this paragraph is to this study.

(p. 169). At the heart of the being of God, we find particularity by virtue of the three persons' relationality to one another (p. 194). The next step in Gunton's argument is crucial: he extrapolates from this conception of the Trinity a specific understanding of the creation marked by its relatedness to the creator (pp. 124, 166, 167). A specifically construed Trinity leads to a concomitant ontology: an ontology of communion that connects being and relation (p. 214). Three open transcendentals result from this: *perichoresis*, substantiality, and relationality. The universe is perichoretic, meaning that everything in the universe is what it is by virtue of its relatedness to everything else (p. 172). Such an ontology honors uniqueness, distinctiveness, and diversity within unity. Gunton's project is most ambitious; he intends to heal the fragmentation of the human cultural enterprise (pp. 7, 151).

The second proposal for a link between Trinity and social ethics is that of the Croatian theologian *Miroslav Volf*, a teacher at the Yale Divinity School. In a seminal essay (1998), he interacted with the notion of "the Trinity is our social programme" expressed by the nineteenth-century Russian theologian Fedorov. Both his affirmation of the positive relation between the Trinity and society and his careful qualification of this relation renders this article important.⁸⁷ Volf justifies some form of analogy between the triune God and society with the biblical warrant of the human creation in God's image. The following question must be answered: In which respects and to what extent should the Trinity serve as a model for human community? (p. 405). He explicitly identifies two basic limitations to any form of modelling: there is an ontic difference between the divine and humanity, and human life is marred by sin and finitude. The road from the doctrine of the Trinity "is long, tortuous and fraught with danger" and requires a process of complex translation (pp. 406, 414). Volf prefers to speak about a "social vision" instead of a "social programme", as the Trinity represents "the contours of the ultimate normative end towards which all social programme[s] should strive" (p. 406). It is crucial to attend carefully to the *precise point of comparison* in his argument. The Trinity serves a heuristic function to disclose "the shape of the social self" (p. 406). Central in Volf's thesis is the "trinitarian construction of identity" (pp. 420, n 210). *A specific notion of identity* is inscribed in the character and relation of the divine persons. For example, the identity of the Son is shaped through a twofold relationship to the Father and Spirit. To avoid the charge directed against much of recent talk about the Trinity and society, Volf situates the construction of identity in the "narrative of divine self-donation" (p. 412); this is the crux of his argument. The doctrine of the Trinity is the "doctrinal

87 All references will be to this article, unless otherwise specifically indicated.

expression of the narrative of the triune God's engagement with humanity" (pp. 423, n 59). In this narrative of *self-donation*, the cross of Jesus Christ takes central position. A social position based on the doctrine of the Trinity should take this downward movement seriously. Divine self-donation is an act of love that involves suffering and risk. This should be imitated (p. 413). In concrete terms, this implies an embrace of the other after truth has been told and justice has been done. In another article, Volf (2006:7) expands the content of the *imitatio Trinitatis*: to identity and donation, he adds creativity, generosity, and reconciliation. In a recent article, Volf (2021:410, 411, 419) confirms his position despite critique by anti-social trinitarians. The Trinity remains

the ultimate source of a Christianly inflected social vision with its account of the self, social relations, and the good.

Social analogies remain indispensable.⁸⁸

Gunton's treatment of the fundamental question of the one and the many, his notion of "trinitarian transcendentals", as well as Volf's carefully argued understanding of identity based on the Trinity should have enduring significance: The way in which they configure their understanding of God, their discernment of social exigencies, and the link to the ethical are constructive.

Recommended further reading

The recommended works include two primary texts by Gunton and Volf, two secondary sources on their oeuvre, and a general source establishing a link between Trinity and the discourse on alterity.

GUNTON, C.

1990. Augustine, the Trinity and the theological crisis of the West. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43(1):33-57. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600039685>

HARVEY, L. (Ed).

2010. *The theology of Colin Gunton*. London: T. & T. Clark.

SANTRAC, A.S.

2016. *Witness to life worth living: Reflections on Miroslav Volf's ethics of embrace*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

⁸⁸ It is interesting to note that he has become more suspicious of relations of origin (2021:413) – "we don't need relations of origin".

VENTER, R.

2012. Triniteit en etiek: Van 'n relasionele God tot 'n etiek van die Ander. *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 46(1), Art. #52, 7 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v46i1.52>

VOLF, M.

2019. *Exclusion and embrace: A theological exploration of identity, otherness, and reconciliation. Revised edition.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon. (see especially the appendix).

4.3 The Trinity and a mystical self

To integrate reflection and life practices, and to argue for the Trinity as a way of life, one should inevitably interact with a set of discourses that have become fairly fashionable in theology and even in religion studies – that of *spirituality* and *mysticism*. To place thinking about God in a Christian sense in this orbit requires the knowledge of a number of *perspectives*, of which *four* can be referred to, in this instance. The so-called “turn to spirituality” has become a widely accepted cypher for understanding the sociology of religious development of contemporary life. The aversion to institutionalised religion, but not necessarily to the embrace of a spiritual journey, is a complex phenomenon and should be understood within the context of the transformations of (post-)modern society (see Kourie 2006). Trinitarian thinking cannot dismiss this. The pertinent question unavoidably surfaces: What exactly is “spirituality”? Especially since the 1960s, a significant effort was made to map the contours of spirituality. A scholar such as Schneiders played a definitive role in helping to clarify this. She (1989:678) distinguishes three senses to the term: a fundamental dimension of being human, the lived experience that actualises that dimension, and an academic discipline that studies that experience. Her definition (1989:684), which has gained wide positive reception, is also relevant in this instance:

the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms of ... self-transcendence towards the ultimate vale that one perceives.

The important aspects of the definition are experience, integration, self-transcendence, and ultimate value. For a Christian interpretation, the specific conceptualization of God as triune obviously moves into focus. But that raises a further question: What exactly is the relationship between theology (read: Systematic Theology) and Spirituality? This has become an outright topic for discussion with various positions. It is no longer tenable to perceive spirituality as deductively determined by doctrine. In an overview of the problematic, Endean (2005:77) refers to the “organic

connection” between theology and spirituality. Nowadays, thinking moves much more in a dialectical way – there is mutual enrichment. A final perspective pertains to the mystical as such. Traditionally, in Protestant circles, one comes across fairly dismissive and hostile positions. The tide has clearly turned, and one can ascribe that again to many factors. One major credit should go to solid scholarship on the nature of mysticism as such. An outstanding intellectual such as McGinn has studied the history of Western mysticism in several extensive volumes⁸⁹ and his (1991:xvii) understanding is crucial:

the mystical element in Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that concern the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God.⁹⁰

What is at stake, in this instance, is an intensification of the experience of God. Thinking about the doctrine of God clearly takes place within a horizon with many changes!

Against this background, one can move to a discussion about the “mystical self”. The first pointer would be to draw attention to the growing interest in a *trinitarian spirituality*, and the studies in this respect have become extensive. One can refer briefly only to two good ones (LaCugna & Downey 1993 and McIntosh 2005). Christian living is about ever fuller participation in communion with God and with one another. LaCugna and Downey (1993:972-974) point out that a trinitarian approach would understand “holiness” differently; it is much more about self-transcending, ecstatic, and relational life. Personhood, communion, and relations become central in this form of spirituality. Prayer is also more than conversation and is about participation in the divine life. Union with God materializes in communion and participation. As relational interdependence is a hallmark of this spirituality (LaCugna & Downey 1993:980), the issue of social justice is crucial, as spiritual life is about rightly ordered relationships. In McIntosh’s reflection, one finds similar emphases; it is about ever-greater intimacy with God. He (2005:179) identifies self-transcendence, a deepening love for others, and a growing sense of freedom and agency as common marks of this spirituality. He (2005:183) raises a critical perspective on alterity. In light of otherness in the Trinity, there is no obliteration of human otherness in the union with God – selfhood is constituted by that. In a trinitarian approach to spirituality, fruitful avenues are opened by relational thinking

89 One can refer, in this instance, to the seven volumes published in the series *The presence of God: A history of Western Christian mysticism*.

90 McGinn’s (1991:265-343) discussion of the “modern study of mysticism” is exceedingly important.

about the divine. When the grammar centres on personhood, relationality, communion, intimacy, and ecstasis, a fairly profiled spirituality comes into view. There is a particular rationale and a unique dynamic and intersubjective quality.

Mysticism has started to gain greater prominence in spiritual practice and scholarship in our time. Rahner (1971:15), an outstanding theologian, was fairly appreciative of spirituality, an exceptional statement to the effect of the importance of mysticism:

the devout Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic', one who has 'experienced' something, or he will cease to be anything at all.

One should not miss the entanglement of the yearning for greater intimacy with the divine with the postmodern moment; it signifies the deep quest for personal fulfilment. In his discussion of the orientation of the contemporary mystical focus, Perrin (2005:454) points to the deconstruction of the classical philosophical idea of God and the emphasis on the "God of extravagant self-giving life". This leads inevitably to the Trinity that is eternally fecund in a threefold event of love – giving, receiving, and returning. That, in turn, leads in the human-divine encounter to a "restructuring of the self" (McIntosh 1998:34, 48, 225). In the giving away of the self, one finds the constitution of the self; the critical insight is that "the trinitarian mutuality of self-dispossession is an eternally affirming, life-constituting reality" (McIntosh 1998:234, 235). It is crucial to note the kind of conception of the self that transpires in this instance: identity lies in the bestowal of freedom towards the other in embrace, in mutuality.

Understandably, this movement into deeper intimacy with the divine leads to greater silence; hence, the renewed appreciation for *apophatism*. The distinction between affirmation and negation in ways of speaking about God was introduced in Christian theology in the sixth century.⁹¹ The mysteriousness and incomprehensibility of God, who cannot be reduced to rational categories, has returned to theology. The trinitarian discourses have played no small role in a renewed sense of the inexhaustible depth of the reality of God. A theologian such as *Kilby* (2010:65, 67), who became well known for her resistance to the trinitarian renaissance and social versions thereof, proposes an "apophatic trinitarianism" as a way to counter what she labels as "trinitarian robustness". She is obviously correct in her fear of idolatry, projection, and overconfidence in speaking the divine, but is questionable whether apophatism should lead to a hesitance of speaking about the "immanent" Trinity at all or of contemplation of the divine (2010:70-71). The relational turn in trinitarian discourse is not cancelled by

91 For a discussion of the history of this, see Louth (2012).

an increased sense of the hiddenness and incomprehensibility of the triune God. Apophatism brings a specific quality to the relational understanding.

The scholar *Coakley* should be recognised for his work in relating theology and spirituality, Trinity, and mysticism. The kind of issues she addresses are productive for the problematic in this instance. She accords *prayer* an outstanding place in trinitarian reflection, referring specifically to Romans 8 (1986:21; 1998:225). This also incorporates the notion of *experiencing the Trinity*. There is a certain mutuality involved with prayer – the Spirit praying in us, God receiving the prayer, and, in exchange, inviting us into the divine life. Her third emphasis is on *desire*. Erotic language becomes an indispensable mode of speaking of our intimacy with God. There is a mutual desire between God and us. In this trinitarian model espoused by her, the *Spirit* receives a dominant role (see 2013:111). The Spirit is the “primary instigator of transformative participation in God”. Interestingly, she continues and claims that prayer has, according to Romans 8, social, cosmic, and political import (2013:114).

In the work of *Sheldrake*, the renowned scholar of spirituality, one encounters an admiring integration of spirituality, Trinity, and *socio-political sensibility*. A trinitarian vision links theology and spirituality, because at stake is about more than mere speaking about God, but a *desire for God* (2010:82). Contemplation is not about self-preoccupation, but about self-forgetfulness (2010:100). According to Sheldrake (2010:115), the historical link between mysticism and subversion should be clearly noted. He (2010:146) emphasises that a trinitarian anthropology “suggests an inherently transgressive rather than bounded, individualized and interiorized understanding of identity”.

Coupling the Trinity with spirituality and specifically with the mystical, accomplishes a remarkable feat; a rich array of motifs appears into focus. Identity, self, experience, intimacy, desire, prayer, self-giving, silence, and society are all intertwined. The textures of a mystical self are virtually inexhaustible, because the God being related to is the Ultimate Source of Meaning.

Recommended further reading

The following are recommended: A historical study of mysticism during the Reformation; a detailed exploration of the Trinity in the life of great mystics; an investigation into the unique contours of Trinitarian spirituality, research on apophatism in the theology of three woman theologians (Kilby, Coakley, and Sonderegger), and finally a description of the mystical-prophetic in the theology of Tracy.

HANSEN, L.

2010. Die mistieke en die profetiese, en die unieke van die mistiek-profetiese in die teologie van David Tracy. *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 51(1&2):83-98.

HUNT, A.

2010. *The Trinity: Insights from thN*: Liturgical Press.

McGINN, B.

2015. Mysticism and the reformation: A brief survey. *Acta Theologica* 35(2):50-65. <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v35i2.4>

VAN KUIKEN, E.J.

2017. "Ye worship ye know not what"? The apophatic turn and the Trinity. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 19(4):401-420. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12227>

VENTER, R.

2015. A trinitarian approach to spirituality: Exploring the possibilities. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71(1), Art. #2952, 7 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i1.2952>

5. TRINITARIAN IMAGINATION AND RECONSTRUCTIONS

5.1 A horizon with many names

Thinking the divine obviously happens in a contingent horizon. Since the mid-twentieth century, theology has become increasingly aware of its own contextuality, and has also started to give more explicitly an account thereof, although it had always been situated in concrete material conditions. Nowadays, there is a heightened attentiveness, a finely tuned sense of discernment of its own *time* in all its dimensions.⁹² Strictly, one could or should have addressed a mapping of the landscape earlier in this reflection. A decision was made to keep it back intentionally and relate it to one important element of a theo-episteme, namely reconstruction. The rationale of the project has not been to construe a creative doctrine of God as such; such a venture would arguably assume a different shape. The task of the cartographer of our contemporary horizon is confronted with an impossible task; the topography is un-navigable. One could at most employ adjectives such as “plural”, “complex”, “contradictory”, and “ambiguous”. One lives in a polyonymous time – it has many names; one cannot capture its character in one word. Naming the present is difficult. One could at most refer to the many labels employed as currency to trade in a bewildering market. The aim of the following is merely to convey a sense of the direction of contemporary time. It is fragmentary, stylistically crude, and even disjunctive. Each one of the cyphers represents a configuration of immense dynamics, constituent dimensions, and implications.

- *Globalisation*: Human society has shrunk through modern communication, transport, and trade, and simultaneously expanded by a modernist disposition. The consequences are immense: much greater networking and interdependence, but also disturbing growth in inequality.
- *Anthropocene*: The dawn of this new geological era highlights the relation between the human being and nature and the alarming destructive impact of societies’ consumer ethos.
- *Identity*: A human rights culture has moved issues of gender, sexual orientation, race, dis/ability, and culture to centre stage. Identity politics are advocating a re-centring of society and the full humanity of all the subaltern persons.

92 In a fine article, McGrath (2012:108, 113) argues for the cultivation of a “habit of theological attentiveness”, referring to the church as a “community of discernment”. It is important to note that he then develops the notion of a “theology of place” (pp. 116-123).

- *Postcolony*: The intricate interwovenness of colonisation, modernism, and the West is being resisted in new political alignments, new epistemic regimes, and new social configurations. In this instance, the key is the deconstruction of an entire new metaphysic with a plethora of new philosophies.
- *Capital*: The tyranny and failure of economic systems have become too obvious in the astounding and unsettling inequality among societies and human beings. Economic injustice pervasively scars human societies.
- *Poly-centres*: International geo-politics are marked by nationalist ambitions, oppositional alignments, and escalating conflict, with a multitude of instances of concentrated violence and global impact.
- *Fourth Industrial Revolution*: Science and technology have made strides with fantastic achievements. The dawn of a digital society, for one example, has drastically changed human life. It remains uncertain what the accomplishments may ultimately entail for the entire spectrum of human society, for example the dawn of sentient artificial intelligence.
- *Postsecularity*: This rubric represents a bewildering scope of contradictory and ambiguous religious trends: from secularisation to fundamentalism. A sociology of religion points to the diminishing of institutionalised religion, a renewed interest in spirituality, a return of religion as public force, a shift to the South in Christianity, a retrieval of traditional religions, and the proliferation of esoteric new religious movements.
- *Posttruth*: The correlation between interpretation and factual empirical reality has collapsed. The sheer fabrication of distortions for political power and reactionary aims is increasing and fuelled by the support of social media.
- *Violence*: The many faces of Ares is an outstanding feature of the contemporary world: military, ethnic, gender, racial, criminal, epistemic, and so on. The deep disrespect for the Other and for life is devastating. The inflation of the use of “trauma” as indicator has become striking. Naming our time as “traumatic” is not without strong warrant.
- *Melancholia*: “Mood” has become a central rubric to gauge the character of the present horizon. One cannot miss the frequent occurrence of adjectives such as “insecure”, “uncertain”, “vulnerable”, and “tragic” in literature. One realises that one’s time is an age of “anger”, “doom”, and “disaster” – an age of sheer cynicism. At present, human life has a certain darkness to it.

This truncated account is admittedly subjective, one-sided, and incomplete. Basically, every bullet can be substantiated with extensive literature references. The purpose of this was to convey the impression of a society in transition, a society confronted by overwhelming challenges. Often, the neologism “glocal” is used to convey the interplay between local conditions and the global world. In every context, the configurations of the cyphers mentioned should be worked out. The South African horizon will be different from the one in Singapore, for example. And the doctrines of God would differ.

Recommended further reading

The Oxford series of “Very Short Introductions” of over 600 little books written by experts is an outstanding resource for orienting one of the vast fields of knowledge of our time. Many of these volumes have direct relevance for mapping the landscape of our time. The following five are examples of what is available.

COPSON, A.

2019. *Secularism: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198747222.001.0001>

COULMAS, F.

2019. *Identity: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198828549.001.0001>

ELLIS, E.C.

2018. *Anthropocene: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198792987.001.0001>

STEGER, M.B.

2020. *Globalization: A very short introduction*. 5th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198849452.001.0001>

YOUNG, R.J.C.

2020. *Postcolonialism: A very short introduction*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198856832.001.0001>

5.2 Responsibility of trinitarian adventures

A *reminder* about the exact rationale or intention of this work may be appropriate. It is a reflection on the construction of a doctrine of God. It is not another proposal for a new construction itself. The very notion of interplay between time and doctrine is at play and should be examined. Writing doctrines of God is a hermeneutical and constructive practice, and that activity must be examined.

In light of what was discussed in the previous sections, and of the focus on the Trinity, one obvious and *fundamental question* transpires, especially in light of the brief account of the horizon mapped. Does trinitarian theology have the resources and the potential to address the multiple challenges heuristically? This is clearly a far-reaching question; it intersects with the question of the vitality of the Christian vision as such to make a meaningful contribution to human sense-making at this stage of civilisation. If the God symbol and specifically the Trinity symbol is central to the identity of the Christian faith, this question is understandably of cardinal significance.

What is *at stake* in this section – the issue of correlation between horizon and construction – is amply *demonstrated* in a fascinating book, published recently with the intriguing title: *God after the church lost control* (2022). The two Scandinavian authors – theologian Henriksen and sociologist Repstad – address the problem of God and change, considering the contemporary landscape in northern Europe. Traditional theology is clearly in a crisis when it comes to speaking about God and its relevance. By exploring issues such as the “morally intolerable God”, the “politically dangerous God”, God as a “she”, and the religious plurality, they probe the possibility of thinking God as “vulnerable love” (2022:140). They focus on the interplay between changing society, crisis of religion, problematic traditional ways of understanding God, and the imperative of a fresh naming.

A reading of the history of theology, say from the 1960s, reveals a commitment and enthusiasm to engage with the myriad social dilemmas and exigencies, especially from the perspective of the confession of God as triune. It is important to acknowledge and point out significant *work done* in this regard. The key occupation was to apply the *social implications* of the relational turn in trinitarian doctrine. A vast number of publications were published in this respect. The proposals by Gunton and Volf were described in earlier sections of this work. To a great extent, one finds a similar enthusiasm for *spirituality*; this was also discussed. In addition to this, a large scope of questions and problems were treated from a trinitarian perspective. One can mention some truly significant work⁹³ on *gender* (Johnson 1992), *sexual difference* (Tonstad (2016), *economy* (Meeks 1989), *science* (Polkinghorne 2004), *evolution* (Edwards 1999), *world religions* (Heim 2001), *culture and Africa* (Kombo 2007), as well as *trauma and horror* (Harrower 2019). A wide range of concerns transpires in these proposals. Work not of the same scope, but also important, can be referred to on *ecology* (Gorringe 2014), *violence* (Papanikolaou 2018),

93 For the sake of brevity, only outstanding publications will be referred to.

and *queering* (Quero & Goh 2018). These represent only a fraction of the scholarship available, but amply prove the body of matters addressed. There is evidently a pervasive conviction that the Trinity matters to contemporary life.

Inevitably, one moves to a point where one should *account* for the phenomenon of theo-constructions. In the long history of theological reflection and development of the doctrine of God, what has been happening in theology since the 1960s is a fairly novel trend and requires some form of perspective. *Five comments* will suffice:

- Reconstruction hardly needs a *warrant*. The immense intra-canonical plurality of naming and of traditions evidence a certain theological datum: believers think from their contingent conditions. The God of 1&2 Samuel is profiled differently than the one in the Book of Revelation. This plurality is a given in Scripture. One should arguably put this perspective more strongly: reconstructions are not only warranted; they are *required*. One should speak the reality and the experience of the divine afresh. It is part of the intersubjective encounter. A living relationship issues an imperative of probing the inexhaustible riches of the triune God continually. New ways of speaking accompany the wonder of the experience.
- The very nature of the practice is inherently *hermeneutical* and *rhetorical*. It is about interpretation within a large conversation with the Bible, the tradition, the context, and the person of the theologian as participants. It is listening to some voices more intently. But it is also about speaking, about construing an argument, with performative intent – to do something.
- The fundamental issue is obviously about the relation between *revelation and construction*. The fairly long discussion on a genealogy also moves into focus, in this instance. Revelation is not mechanical, and construction is not projection. The crystallisation of Yahwism through experience, the encounter with Jesus of Nazareth and his resurrection, the tortuous route of the formulation cannot be thought without the category of revelation. But, at the same time, the active role of reflective intellectual work cannot be dismissed. Images of God have been born in this complex organic entanglement of revelation and thinking.
- Reconstruction is fundamentally *faithful imagining*. Speaking about the divine is carried by extraordinary feats of human creative imagination. But it is also faithful – faithful to the wisdom of very long traditions in the Bible and in history, and to the possibility of doxology. The faithful

imagination tries to translate the divine in categories that maintain a sense of identifiability, recognisability, enabling believers to worship the same God – and that is utterly crucial.

- Reconstructions have as primary intent *performance* in mind: to enable people to make sense. Conventionally, scholars intend to establish intelligibility in dialogue with secular disciplines or non-Western cultures, to advocate liberation and agency among the marginalized, to further comfort in conditions of trauma, or to contribute to different behaviour patterns. The catalogue of motivations is basically limitless. The pertinent question is whether these performative effects correspond with the corpus of behaviour patterns relative to the matrix of the Christian faith. Does it encourage greater commitment? Does it lead to more obedient lives? Does it liberate people? In short, do these constructions cultivate patterns of faith, hope, and love?

A typical question that may surface is the one about the *how*, and this cannot be casuistically answered. There is no recipe, no template to be followed with faithful imagination; it is free, creative, captivating, and subversive. What one finds in contemporary trinitarian ones are most often an excavation of the possibilities of the relational paradigm, some form of analogical thinking, and an exploration of typical and prominent biblical motifs. The vitality of the biblical vision cannot be missed; it possesses an immense surplus of meaning. The plurality of text types – narrative, prophetic sapiential, apocalyptic literature, the movement from creation to salvation to perfection, the emphases on bodiliness, struggle, vulnerability, hospitality – all establish a pool of rhetorical resources that can be consulted for great imaginative construals.

To the initial fundamental question about the ultimate potential of the triune symbol to interact with the landscape constructively, one should give a *nuanced answer*. There are indications of significant work already done, but it is also evident that *much work lies ahead*. Whether it is a question about the vitality of the symbol or rather one of the capacity of theologians to think imaginatively enough should be considered. A host of questions and challenges remain *insufficiently addressed*. One may point to the imperative of decolonisation; the expansion of technology and the reality of artificial intelligence; the suffocating growth of fundamentalism and the erosion of truth; the depressing collective mood of cynicism; the inattention of theology to the affective turn; agency of women and gender violence, and the increased valuation of everyday life – all of these are in dire need of trinitarian engagement.

Recommended further reading

The recommendations cover three descriptions of developments in the doctrine of God, and the remaining two address prominent questions on African culture and the imperative of decolonisation.

JOHNSON, E.A.

2007. *Quest for the living God: Mapping frontiers in the theology of God*. London: Continuum.

JONES, S. & LAKELAND, P. (EDS)

2005. *Constructive theology: A contemporary approach to classical themes*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press (specifically Chapter 1). <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1hqdhmw>

SAKUPAPA, T.C.

2019. The Trinity in African Christian theology: An overview of contemporary approaches. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1), a5460. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5460>

VENTER, R.

2018. God in Systematic Theology after Barth: Trends and perspectives. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 4(2):303-333. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2018.v4n2.a15>

VERHOEF, A.H.

2021. Decolonising the concept of the Trinity to decolonise the religious education curriculum. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77(4), a6313. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6313>

5.3. A God for South Africa?

It is a valid expectation to enquire about a doctrine of God for South Africa. How would one approach an intentionally constructive view of God for this context? Four perspectives will be raised in this regard: the history of doctrinal approaches; the current landscape; a suggestion about the way ahead, and a note about a possible shape.

One cannot really think about constructing a creative proposal without a sense of what has happened in Systematic Theology. Unfortunately, no *history* of this *discipline* is available in South Africa; one can at most mention some *impressions*:

- The textbook era of the mid-1970s would enable one some form of sure footing. The trailblazing work done by theologians such as König (1975), Durand (1976), and Heyns (1978) was important in the overall development of the discipline of Systematic Theology. These theologies were Euro-centric and the Trinity, although expressly recognised as important, was not employed in a creative sense. The dominant role of

Reformed theology and a sensitivity to be *confessionally* sound were characteristic of this era.

- The Roman Catholic theologian Gaybba (1994; 2004) should be credited for innovation and for incorporating tenets of *social trinitarianism* in his doctrinal presentations.
- How the doctrine functioned as resource in the fight against *apartheid* warrants a study of its own. The impression is, and this could be rebutted, that the full critical resources of the doctrine of the Trinity were not employed. There were attempts to envision God in terms of Black Theology (see Maimela 1993) and of liberation in general (see Nolan 1988), but the full political potential of the confession was not excavated.
- The period after the dawn of *democracy in 1994* inaugurated much greater trinitarian awareness and more encouragement to do *creative constructive work*. Apart from Nürnberger (2016) in his ambitious two-volume Systematic Theology, most of the reflections have taken the form of doctoral dissertations or journal articles. Nürnberger (2016:407) truncated the significance to a theodicy application. Theologians such as Vosloo (2004) explored the Trinity for an ethic of hospitality; Smit (2009) was interested in Reformed approaches, and Conradie (2013), no enthusiast of social trinitarianism, proposed ways to do trinitarian theology. A theologian/philosopher such as Verhoef (2019), who completed a doctorate on Jenson in several articles, explored innovative avenues for interpreting the Trinity, for example in dialogue with poststructuralism. A number of PhDs focused on the Trinity with multiple interests; the ones by Van Wyk (2013) on ecclesiology and by Deetlefs (2018) on politics may be mentioned. There has clearly been an interest to “catch up” with wider, international discourses.
- One specific field of research should be highlighted: the connection of the *Trinity to Africa*. This is a significant development. These often took the form of journal articles and PhD dissertations. This turn to the cultural reality of the continent is a significant shift in South African theology. One may refer, in this instance, to joint projects by Manganyi and Buitendag (2013; 2017).
- One’s impressions are somewhat *ambiguous* when taking stock of trinitarian thinking in South Africa. It has always been realised that the Trinity is somewhat important, and there are clearly evidences of more creative engagements and reconstructive. But the outputs remain limited, sporadic, and even incidental.

No reconstructive is possible without some attempt at describing the *character of the South African reality*. It would be a banal cliché to label this context as “complex”, but in all fairness, the country has contracted most of the challenges available at present. The horizon mapped in 5.1 fits this country’s landscape, only a dense specificity distinguishes the South African one. A few of the features may be mentioned:

- South Africa cannot escape the global *ecological crisis*. It is part of this planetary exigency.
- The racial legacy of apartheid is not something of the past, despite constitutional change. *Relational alienation*, despite some strides made, continues. The discourse on reconciliation has sadly been eclipsed by radicalised ones.
- The Hydra face of *violence* has become one of the outstanding features of the country and it appears as if the faces, whether gender, farmer, or sheer criminality, keep on proliferating.
- The excessive *economic disparity* between rich and poor continues to scar the face of this country. The ugly face of poverty in all its manifestations does not diminish.
- Increasingly, despite efforts to counter the so-called “state-capture”, *corruption* on various levels of government continues to be the mode of operation.
- *From a religious perspective*, South African society is a smorgasbord of what seems available and possible. One finds instances of increased secularisation, fundamentalism, retrieval of traditional religions, African Pentecostalism, and African initiated religions.
- The collective *mood* is arguably one of depression and one of cynicism.

The South African horizon is an epitome of *plurality, contradictions, and ambiguity*. Theologians should navigate a course within these waters. Despite the bleak picture sketched, it remains an immensely *fertile space* for doing intellectual work, for thinking the divine.

The way ahead might take surprising directions. The *proposal* of this limited study is the following:

- The South African community of systematic theologians is a relatively small network of thinkers and theologians; all have some form of interest. A plea may be in place: the *reality of the divine* is the distinctive reality in theology; theological work should take this more seriously and relate this more explicitly to the multiple social questions.

Furthermore, the symbol of the Trinity is the ultimate resource for sense-making. This requires *more attention* in the myriad attempts at doing contextual theology.

- Doctrines of God should be approached intentionally in a *multidisciplinary* manner. To refer to the Bible does not imply that the theologian has engaged with the state of scholarship of the Old and the New Testament. The substantial work done by biblical scholars should be integrated by Systematic Theology; one may merely refer, in this instance, to Old Testament scholars such as J. Claassens and J. Gericke, who published extensively on God. South African theologians have never been great patristic scholars. Greater attention to the study of Early Christianity remains a future task. Some interaction has taken place with Continental Philosophy of Religion, but much work remains to be done, especially on phenomenology.
- The neglect of the *relational paradigm* should be redressed. Within a South African context, this could be employment with much fruit. Reformed scholars' intuition to restrict the functioning of the Trinity to action in the *economia*, the anxiety about speculation, and the neglect of mimetic thinking should be questioned. The confession of a triune God can function discursively in a variety of ways. This acknowledgement is *sine qua non* for a vibrant trinitarian theology.
- All *violence, poverty, homophobia, and corruption* render the doctrine of the Trinity a public doctrine. The confession of God as triune could contribute to a *public discourse*. Sporadic work by Koopman (for example, 2007) on Trinity and public theology is important and should be developed further. The connection between God and morality should be argued more strongly and more publicly.
- More recently, the insistence on doing *de-colonising theology* has gained much momentum. Limited work has been completed so far on the doctrine of God and specifically the Trinity. It is not yet clear what a *postcolonial God* may resemble. Would a radicalised version entail a dismissal of the entire genealogical trajectories as described in chapter 2? Would the trinitarian canon of the fourth century be set aside? If decolonisation – at minimum – refers to pluriversality (Mbembe 2016:37), it may entail an incorporation of marginalised voices – persons, cultures, and religious traditions. This would be possible. Some work has been done, but much work would lie ahead. Hardly anything, if anything at all, has been done on African women and the Trinity, and the Trinity in African Pentecostalism and African Initiated Churches. The inter-religious dialogue would require much more attention and

describe what truly happened in the missionary encounter between the trinitarian vision and traditional religions. In this de-colonising reconstruction, the performative function of the Trinity would require pronounced attention; for one, the *agency* of the marginalised would have to receive definitive prominence.

The task ahead for construing a contextual doctrine of God seems virtually an impossible task. There are simply too many considerations to integrate. Maybe the notion of an encompassing constructive doctrine of God is not viable. There are DNA elements that cannot be abandoned, such as the ones mentioned in the first three proposals of this work. Reconstructions would be perspectival. However, a *trinitarian habitus*, an entire way of thinking, is required in theology. When doing theology, a trinitarian optic should be present. But a doctrine of God, as reconstruction, would arguably remain, to refer to the title of Pohier's touching theological autobiography of *God-in Fragments* (1986). The South African God would arguably be a kind of *God-in-fragments*. This is why it requires a network of thinkers to engage in trinitarian imagining.

Recommended further reading

The recommendations include two attempts at mapping the features of trinitarian discourse in South Africa, one on the decolonisation of the Trinity, one on the global inter-religious dialogue and a final one on the challenges of speaking God at a public university.

CONRADIE, E.M.

2019. South African discourse on the triune God: Some reflections. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1), a5483. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5483>.

CONRADIE, E.M. & SAKUPAPA, T.C.

2018 "Decolonizing the doctrine of the Trinity" or "The decolonizing doctrine of the Trinity"? *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 161:37-53.

VENTER, R.

2013. Speaking God at a public university in South Africa: The challenge of epistemological transformation. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39 Supplement:231-245.

2016. The Triune God in South African Systematic Theology since 1976. In: D.F. Tolmie and R. Venter (eds), *Theology and the post(apartheid) condition: Genealogies and future directions* (Bloemfontein: SUN MeDIA), pp. 156-168. <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781920382919>

2018. Thinking God in a global multi-religious context: Trends, challenges, and possibilities. *Journal for the Study of Religion* 31(1) (2018) 70-85. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2413-3027/2018/v31n1a4>

6. CONCLUSION

A doctrine of God is important in any account of the Christian faith; it should receive adequate and thorough attention. It is not merely yet another element. God is the central symbol. This exposition should be consistently trinitarian. This is how the divine is identified in this religion and this is the one stable element in a constellation of cognitive dimensions; the remainder – creation, salvation, hope – are inferences from this one datum. The *Trinity* is the point of departure – God is Father, Son, and Spirit. How that confession is interpreted and represented can take many shapes and forms. This short study was interested in the contemporary doctrine of God.

One of the basic proposals was that greater attention should be paid to a *genealogical description*, and various trajectories were identified. These trajectories signal radical shifts that took place and these changes should be expressly mapped. Such a move expresses the historical nature of the religions and carries a great deal of heuristic potential. The trajectories discussed all manifest something revolutionary, namely the emergence of exclusive monotheism, metaphysical trinitarianism, social trinitarianism, and anatheism. The treatment took the form of vignettes, and more detailed exploration should obviously happen in future. What crystallised is an intricate interaction among social conditions, philosophical categories, and profiles of God. Many questions can obviously also be raised.

Some *basic insights*, however, transpired from this approach. The understanding and articulation of the divine are undergoing mutations, but always within the context of vehement contestation. Shifts do not take place smoothly and acceptance is never unanimous; the old proceeds with a resilient tenacity. Resistances to change in the Christian faith can take several positions – a preference for a one-ness theology in monotheistic theistic form, or for substance metaphysical trinitarianism with rejection of social models of thinking. Within each trajectory, for example within the Old Testament, whole. This internal plurality should be clearly observed and hermeneutically navigated. A genealogical approach to a doctrine of God is unavoidably a multidisciplinary undertaking: a conversation between Old Testament, New Testament, Patristics, Philosophy, and Systematic Theology. It is not a case of merely referring to a few sources in those fields, but rather a proper engagement with the various states of scholarship in these disciplines. The current profile is fairly blurred. There is an uneasiness with the relational paradigm; some regard it as a deviation from the typical classical Augustinian one; others deem it too adventurous. Some thinkers want to “retrieve” a classical model, others embrace a more apophatic and postmodern approach.

Whatever the critique about the *relational paradigm*, the heuristic potential can be rebutted only with difficulty. There is a long tradition of thinking the Trinity, inevitably in terms of relationality, and modern thought forms have radicalised that. The relational mode of conceptualisation opens fruitful avenues for thinking the nature of being, of the human, and of socio-ethics. The key, however, would be how to interpret the relational identity of God. One productive suggestion could be to attend more to motifs such as hiddenness and pursue an apophatic, after much kataphasis has taken place.

The treatment of a possible genealogy in this study is *incomplete*. The first two trajectories – the birth gods and the rise of Yahwism – should also receive attention. This would give a doctrine of God a much greater intellectual respectability and generate possibilities of dialogue with more disciplines in the humanities. One central question should be addressed in a more detailed treatment: the precise role of revelation. How should one understand the traditional emphasis on revelation amidst a range of social and intellectual interactions?

In the *second proposal* set – that of a *grammar* for speaking – a number of insights have been produced. Concerning the *who* question, the question of divine *identity*, one could be impressed by the vibrant scholarship of theologians such as Barth, Jenson, and LaCugna. There is a real danger that a younger generation of theologians could succumb to the danger of forgetting. It would be sad if the work of a person such as LaCugna be relegated to the margins of memory. The twentieth century, especially since the 1960s, experienced a dense period of theo-reflection. Interests move on and changes have taken place, but the work of theologians should be intentionally *remembered*.

Three major insights surfaced in the discussion of *divine identity*. The *Rahner Rule* remains utterly crucial. Although there is clearly no uniform interpretation of this axiom, the trend to focus on the economic activity and shrug the shoulders about the alleged mystery of the immanent life, will not do. LaCugna's position is problematic, but she correctly points to the mystery already present in the *oikonomia*. It is logically inevitable to think "back" from the economic Trinity to the identity of the divine life. Naming in this regard is obviously always analogical and metaphoric.

The *category of the event* prioritised by Barth is another major perspective. This underlines the movement of categories from the anthropomorphic to being to relationship. What this implies has not yet been fully explored.

Finally, Jenson's courageous embrace of *temporality* in his trinitarian theology is another critical avenue that cannot be ignored in future thinking on God.

Attention to the *what* question, the question traditionally about *attributes*, may capture one of the fundamental issues in a doctrine. What does one refer to when one refers to the divine? What is "god"? The critique of onto-theology has immensely complicated that. If God is not the highest form of being, what exactly is "goodness"? The one critical achievement of the trinitarian turn and the work of Barth is the realisation that all attempts at attributing descriptors to God should be determined in a trinitarian manner. It is surprising that scholars could even ponder this without the filter of the triune reality. In the proposal, the notions of "hiddenness" and "justice" have been attended to as prime associations for speaking God in our time. It expresses not only dominant biblical traditions, but also something of the yearnings of our time. One should consider the suggestion that the attribute approach could be complemented by an approach from narratology. Viewing God as character in a drama may yield perspectives more commensurable with the dynamic of intersubjective relations than a static metaphysical approach. This insight may be one of the contributions of this study.

Divine action has arguably become the central dilemma in the human quest for God: *where* is God? The contemporary horizon, with its excessive traumatic experiences, has intensified this intellectual struggle. This research proposes that it should be addressed in the doctrine of God itself. If a theologian may find a rationale for a separate doctrine of providence, it could be explored there in more detail, but structural treatment should be tied as closely as possible to the identity question in the doctrine of God. This study emphasised *one basic direction* – divine action should be interpreted in a consistent trinitarian manner. This would generate a textured view on God's presence and action in the world. Each one of the divine Persons is associated with a unique constellation of motifs: for example, faithfulness, vulnerability, but also sheer occurrences of historical novelty. On a trinitarian basis, it would be possible to speak about God's action in a manner defeating cynicism, extending comfort, and being credible amidst suffering.

Concerning the *third major section* of the study, an argument was developed that pleads for overcoming the divide between doctrine and life. What one believes about God should matter in the way one lives. Several approaches for *integrating* Systematic Theology, Ethics and Spirituality were mentioned. The suggestion espoused was to think in terms of *self-formation*. This emphasis on God and self is a fairly neglected

one in doctrines of God, and the study attempts to redress this lacuna. A belief in a triune God should form and nurture a “trinitarian self”, and this notion was unpacked in terms of ethics and mysticism. A life oriented towards a God, who is Father, Son, and Spirit, leads to life continually seeking greater intimacy with God, but also one of journeying increasingly outwardly to embracing the other. The trinitarian self is a mystical and political self. A responsible doctrine of God would be wisely oriented to this mystical-prophetic way of living.

The *final part* of the reflection addressed a prominent trend in current thinking – the insistence on *creative re-imagining* of the divine in light of multiple social questions of our time. The study has aligned itself fully with this direction and suggested the contours of our current moment. Reconstruction belongs to the very heart of thinking and speaking God nowadays. At stake is more than merely applying a certain method; re-imagining is fundamentally and inherently a theological task. The inexhaustible rich life of the trinitarian God requires de-domestication of settled categories of thinking, the de-ossification of pacifying doctrines. The hiddenness of God should be considered again and again from the world in which one must make sense from day to day. But this sense-making should steer back to the great associations of creation, salvation, and perfection; it should help us glorify God and enable us to live as icons of this God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALBERTZ, R.

1994a. *A history of Israelite religion in the Old Testament period. Vol 1.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox.

1994b. *A history of Israelite religion in the Old Testament period. Vol 2.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox.

2003. *Israel in exile: The history and literature of the sixth century B.C.E.* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

ANATOLIOS, K.

2007. Discourse on the Trinity. In: A. Casidy, & F.W. Norris (eds), *The Cambridge history of Christianity. Vol 2 Constantine to c. 600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp 431-459. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521812443.020>

2011. *Retrieving Nicaea: The development and meaning of trinitarian doctrine.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

ARMSTRONG, K.

1993. *A history of God.* London: Mandarin.

ASSMANN, J.

2010. *The price of monotheism.* Stanford: Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804772860>

AYRES, L.

2004. *Nicaea and its legacy: An approach to fourth-century trinitarian theology.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198755066.001.0001>

2010. (Mis)Adventures in trinitarian ontology. In: J. Polkinghorne (ed.), *The Trinity and an entangled world* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), pp. 130-145.

2019. Exegesis in the trinitarian controversies. In: P.M. Blowers & P.W. Martens (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of early Christian biblical interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 439-454. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198718390.013.28>

AYRES, L. & RADDE-GALLWITZ, A.

2008. Doctrine of God. In: S.A. Harvey & D.G. Hunter (eds), *The Oxford handbook of early Christian studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 864-885. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199271566.003.0043>

BANNER, M. & TORRANCE, A.J. (EDS).

2006. *The doctrine of God and theological ethics.* London: T & T Clark.

BARNES, M.R.

2011. Latin trinitarian theology, In: P.C. Phan (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to the Trinity.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 70-84. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521877398.005>

- BARRETT, M.**
2021. *Simply Trinity: The unmanipulated Father, Son and Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- BARTH, K.**
1957. *Church Dogmatics 11/1*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
1975. *Church Dogmatics 1/1*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- BARTON, J.**
2007. Imitation of God in the Old Testament. In: R.P. Gordon (ed.), *The God of Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 35-46.
- BASSLER, J.M.**
1982. *Divine impartiality: Paul and a theological axiom*. Chico, Calif: Scholars Press.
- BATES, M.W.**
2015. *The birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in the New Testament and early Christian interpretation of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198729563.001.0001>
- BECK, A.J.**
2016. God, creation, and providence in post-Reformation Reformed theology. In: U.L. Lehner & R.A. Muller (eds), *The Oxford handbook of early modern theology, 1600-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 195-212. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199937943.013.27>
- BEHR, J.**
2004. *The Nicene Faith. Parts 1 & 2*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- BENJAMINS, R.**
2015. The postsecular and systematic theology: reflections on Kearney and Nancy. *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 76(2):116-128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2015.1067828>
- BERKHOF, H.**
1993. *Christelijk geloof. 7th Ed.* Nijkerk: G.F. Callenbach.
- BINGHAM, D.J. (Ed.)**
2010. *The Routledge companion to early Christian thought*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203864517>
- BOFF, L.**
1988. *Trinity and society*. Kent: Burns & Oates.
- BOWEN, A. & SIMMONS, J.A.**
2022. It takes two to make a thing go right: Phenomenology, theology, and Janicaud. *Open Theology* 8:1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0190>

BRUEGGEMANN, W.

1995. "In the image of God" ... pluralism. *Modern Theology* 11(4):455-469. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.1995.tb00076.x>

1997. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, dispute, advocacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

2005. Counterscript: Living with the elusive God. *Christian Century* 29 November: 22-28.

BUTIN, P.W.

2001. *The Trinity*. Louisville: Geneva Press.

CAPEL, D.B.

2019. New Testament Christology. In: S. McKnight & N.K. Gupta (eds), *The state of New Testament studies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), pp. 161-181.

CAPUTO, J.D.

2020. The subjunctive power of God. *Concilium* 2020/3:12-21. <https://doi.org/10.36592/9786587424163-21>

CARR, D.M.

2014. *Holy resilience: The Bible's traumatic origins*. New Haven: Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300204568.001.0001>

CASSIDY-DEKETELAERE, N.

2022. Towards a phenomenology of kenosis: Thinking after the theological turn. *Open Theology* 8:128-152. <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0201>

CHRISTIAN, D.

2018. *Origin story: A big history of everything*. London: Allan Lane.

COAKLEY, S.

1986. Can God be experienced as Trinity? *Modern Churchman* 28(2):11-23. <https://doi.org/10.3828/MC.28.2.11>

1998. Living into the mystery of the Holy Trinity: Trinity, prayer, and sexuality. *Anglican Theological Review* 80:223-232.

2007. Disputed questions in Patristic trinitarianism. *Harvard Theological Review* 100(2): 125-138. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816007001472>

2013. *God, sexuality, and the self: An essay "On the Trinity"*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139048958>

COLLINS, R.

1998. *The sociology of philosophies: A global theory of intellectual change*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

CONRADIE, E.M.

2013. Only a fully trinitarian theology will do, but where can that be found? *NGTT* 54 (1&2):20-28. Suppl:39-54. <https://doi.org/10.5952/54-1-2-318>

CROSBY, M.H.

2005. *Spirituality of the beatitudes: Matthew's vision for the church in an unjust world*. rev ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

CUNNINGHAM, D.S.

1998a. Participation as a trinitarian virtue: Challenging the current "relational" consensus. *Toronto Journal of Theology* 14(1): 7-25. <https://doi.org/10.3138/tjt.14.1.7>

1998b. *These three are one: The practice of trinitarian theology*. Oxford: Blackwell.

2003. The Trinity. In: K.J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to postmodern theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 186-202. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL052179062X.011>

2008. *Christian ethics: The end of the law*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203929759>

DAHL, N.S.

1991. The neglected factor in New Testament theology. In: Idem, *Jesus the Christ* (ed. by D H Juel) (Minneapolis: Fortress), pp. 153-163.

DEETLEFS, J.P.

2018. *God-images and politics: The contribution of trinitarian theology*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Bloemfontein: University of the Free State.

DÜNZL, F.

2007. *A brief history of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Early church*. London: T & T Clark.

DUQUOC, C.

1992. "Who is God?" becomes "Where is God?" The shift in a question. *Concilium* 4/1002:1-10.

DURAND, J.J.F.

1976. *Die lewende God*. Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel.

EDWARDS, D.

1999. *The God of evolution: A trinitarian theology*. New York: Paulist Press.

EHRMAN, B.D.

2018. *The triumph of Christianity: How a forbidden religion swept the world*. London: Oneworld.

ELLIOTT, A.

2020. *Concepts of the self*. 4th ed. Cambridge: Polity.

ENDEAN, P.

2005. Spirituality and theology. In: P. Sheldrake (ed.), *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox), pp. 74-79.

- FELDMEIER, R. & SPIECKERMANN, H.
2011. *God of the Living: A biblical theology*. Waco: Baylor University Press.
- FOUCAULT, M.
1970. *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. New York: Vintage.
- FRETHEIM, T.E.
1998. Some reflections on Brueggemann's God. In: T. Linafelt & T.M. Beal (eds), *God in the fray: A tribute to Walter Brueggemann*. (Minneapolis: Fortress), pp. 24-37.
- FREEMAN, C.
2008. *AD 381: Heretics, pagans and the Christian state*. London: Pimlico.
- FRIEDMAN, R.E.
1995. *The disappearance of God: A divine mystery*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.
- GAYBBA, B.
1994. Trinitarian experience and doctrine. In: J. de Gruchy & C. Villa-Vicencio (eds), *Doing theology in context* (Cape Town: David Philip), pp. 77-88.
2004. *God is a community: A general survey of Christian theology*. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press.
- GIBSON, D.
2010. God-obsessed: David Tracy's theological quest. *Commonweal* 29 January:10-17.
- GODZIEBA, A.J.
2011. The trinitarian mystery of God: A "theological theology". In: F.S. Fiorenza & Galvin J.P. (eds), *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress), pp. 131-199. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22nm83q.9>
- GORRINGE, T.
2014. The Trinity. In: M.S. Northcott & P.M. Scott (eds), *Systematic Theology and climate change* (London: Routledge), pp. 15-32.
- GRENZ, S.J.
2004. *Rediscovering the triune God: The Trinity in contemporary theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- GROOTHUIS, D.
No date. Review of *God: A Biography* by J Miles. [Online.] Retrieved from <http://www.equip.org/PDF/DG119.pdf> [19 July 2022].
- GSCHWANDTNER, C.M.
2013. *Postmodern apologetics: Arguments for God in contemporary philosophy*. New York: Fordham University Press. <https://doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823242740.001.0001>

GUNTON, C.E.

1993. *The one, the three and the many: God, creation and the culture of modernity*. (The Bampton Lectures 1992). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1996. Indispensable opponent: The relations of Systematic Theology and the philosophy of religion. *Neues Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 38:298-306. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nzst.1996.38.3.298>

1997. *The promise of trinitarian theology*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: T & T Clark. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567690333>

2002. *Act and being: Towards a theology of the divine attributes*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

2003. *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Towards a fully trinitarian theology*. London: T & T Clark. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567690289>

HAACKER, K.

2003. *The theology of Paul's letter to the Romans*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511615467>

HADOT, P.

2002. *What is ancient philosophy?* Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

HANSON, R.P.C.

2005. (Org 1988). *The search for the Christian doctrine of God: The Arian controversy 318-381*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

HARARI, Y.N.

2011. *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. London: Harvill Secker.

HARROWER, S.

2019. *God of all comfort: A trinitarian response to the horrors of this world*. Bellingham: Lexham.

HARVEY, L.

2018. Essays on the Trinity: Introduction. In: L. Harvey (ed.), *Essays on the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books), pp. 1-13.

HARVEY, S.A. & HUNTER, D.G. (Eds).

2008. *The Oxford handbook of early Christian studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199271566.001.0001>

HAYS, R.B.

2002. The God of mercy who rescues us from the present evil age: Romans and Galatians. In: A.A. Das & F.J. Matera (eds), *The forgotten God*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox), pp. 123-143.

HEIM, S.M.

2001. *The depth of the riches: A trinitarian theology of religious ends*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0025.00150>

HENRIKSEN, J-O.

2010. Thematizing otherness: On ways of conceptualizing transcendence and God in recent philosophy of religion. *Studia Theologica* 64:153-176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0039338X.2010.523230>

HENRIKSEN, J-O. & REPSTAD, P.

2022. *God after the church lost control: Sociological analysis and critical-constructive theology*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003306207>

HEYNS, J.A.

1978. *Dogmatiek*. Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel Transvaal.

1992. *Inleiding tot die Dogmatiek*. Halfway House: NG Kerkboekhandel.

HOLMES, C.R.J.

2007. *Revisiting the doctrine of the divine attributes: In dialogue with Karl Barth, Eberhard Jüngel, and Wolf Krötke*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

HOLMES, S.R.

2009. Three versus one? Some problems of social trinitarianism. *Journal of Reformed Theology* (3):77-89. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156973109X403732>

2012a. Divine attributes. In: K.M. Kopic & B.L. McCormack (eds), *Mapping modern theology: A thematic and historical introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), pp. 47-65.

2012b. *The quest for the Trinity: The doctrine of God in Scripture, history and modernity*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity.

HORTON, M.

2011. *The Christian faith: A Systematic Theology for pilgrims on the way*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

HOWARD-SNYDER, D. & GREEN, A.

2022. Hiddenness of God. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/divine-hiddenness>.

HUIJGEN, A.

2017. Traces of the Trinity in the Old Testament: From individual texts to the nature of revelation. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 19(3):251-270. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12222>

HURTADO, L.W.

2003. *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

2005. *How on earth did Jesus become a God? Historical questions about the earliest devotion to Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

2010a. *God in the New Testament*. Nashville: Abingdon.

2010b. Early devotion to Jesus: A report, reflections and implications. *The Expository Times* 122(4):167-176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524610388102>

2016. *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian distinctiveness in the Roman world*. Waco, Tx: Baylor University Press.

IRVIN, D.T.

2011. The Trinity and socio-political ethics. In: P.C. Phan (ed.), *The Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 398-411. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521877398.023>

JACOBSON, R.A.

2010. "The LORD is a God of justice" (Isaiah 30:18): The prophetic insistence on justice in social context. *Word & World* 30(2):125-134.

JAMES, I.

2012. *The new French philosophy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

JANICAUD, D.

2001. The theological turn of French phenomenology. In: D. Janicaud, J-F. Courtine, J-L. Chrétien, J-L. Marion, M. Henry & P. Ricoeur, *Phenomenology and the "theological turn"*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, pp. 16-87.

JENSON, R.W.

1995a. Justification as a triune event. *Modern Theology* 11(4):421-427. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.1995.tb00074.x>

1995b. What is the point of trinitarian theology? In: C. Schwöbel (ed.), *Trinitarian theology today: Essays on divine being and act* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), pp. 31-43.

1997. *Systematic Theology vol 1. The triune God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2000. The hidden and the triune God. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2(1):5-12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1463-1652.00024>

2004. Eschatology. In: P. Scott & W.T. Cavanaugh (eds), *The Blackwell companion to political theology* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 407-420. <https://doi.org/10.1111/b.9780631223429.2003.00030.x>

2010 (orig. 1969). *God after God: The God of the past and the God of the future as seen in the work of Karl Barth*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

2018. Choose ye this day whom ye will serve... In: L. Harvey (ed.), *Essays on the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade), pp. 14-19.

JOAS, H.

1983. *The sacredness of the person: A new genealogy of human rights*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.

JOHNSON, E.A.

1992. *SHE WHO IS: The mystery of God in feminist theological discourse*. New York: Crossroads. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S036096690002750X>

JONAS, H.

1987. The concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish voice. *The Journal of Religion* 67(1):1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1086/487483>

JONKERS, P.

2005. God in France. Heidegger's legacy. In: P. Jonkers & R. Welten (eds). *God in France: Eight contemporary French thinkers on God*. (Leuven: Peeters), pp. 1-42.

JÜNGEL, E.

1999. On the doctrine of justification. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1(1):24-52. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1463-1652.00003>

KÄRKKÄINEN, V-M.

2014. *Trinity and revelation. Vol 2. A constructive Christian theology for the pluralistic world*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

2019. *Christian theology in the pluralistic world: A global introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

KASPER, W.

1983. *The God of Jesus Christ*. London: SCM.

KAUFMAN, G.D.

1993: *In face of mystery: A constructive theology*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

KEARNEY, R.

2001a. *The God who may be: A hermeneutics of religion*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

2001b. The God who may be. In: J.D. Caputo, M. Dooley & M.J. Scanlon (eds). *Questioning God*. (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press), pp. 153-185. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvz937hx.10>

2003. *Strangers, gods and monsters*. New York: Routledge.

2006. Epiphanies of the everyday: Toward a micro-eschatology. In: J.P. Manoussakis (ed.), *After God*. (New York: Fordham), pp. 3-20. <https://doi.org/10.5422/fso/9780823225316.003.0001>

2007. Re-imagining God. In: J.D. Caputo & M.J. Scanlon (eds). *Transcendence and beyond: A postmodern inquiry*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), pp. 51-65.

2009. Returning to God after God: Levinas, Derrida, Ricoeur. *Research in Phenomenology* 39: 167-183. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916409X448157>.

2010. *Anatheism: Returning to God after God*. New York: Columbia University Press.

2016. Epilogue: In guise of a response. In: R. Kearney & J. Zimmermann (eds). *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney debates God*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 240-258. <https://doi.org/10.7312/columbia/9780231161039.003.0011>

2017. God making: An essay in theopoetic imagination. *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 4(1):31-44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20539320.2017.1319625>.

2021. A game of Jacks: Review essay of John D. Caputo's recent works. *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 47(5):570-586. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01914537211017168>

KEATING, J.F. & WHITE, T.J. (Eds).

2009. *Divine impassibility and the mystery of human suffering*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

KILBY, K.

2000. Perichoresis and projection: Problems with social doctrine of the trinity. *New Blackfriars* 81(957):432-445. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2000.tb06456.x>

2010. Is an apophatic trinitarianism possible? *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12(1):65-77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2400.2009.00494.x>

2014. Trinity, tradition, and politics. In: C. Chalamet & M. Vial (eds), *Recent developments in trinitarian theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), pp. 73-86. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9m0sgx.5>

KOMBO, J.H.O.

2007. *The doctrine of God in African Christian thought: The Holy Trinity, theological hermeneutics, and the African intellectual Culture*. Leiden: Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004158047.i-298>

KÖNIG, A.

Hier is ek! Gelowig nagedink. Deel 1- Oor God. Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel.

KOOPMAN, N.

2007. Public theology in (South) Africa: A trinitarian approach. *International Journal of Public Theology* 1:188-209. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156973207X207335>

- KORPEL, M. & DE MOOR, J.
2012. *The silent God*. Leiden: Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004203907.i-378>
- KOURIE, C.
2006. The “turn” to spirituality. *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 8:19-38.
- KRÖTKE, W.
2001. *Gottes Klarheiten: Eine Neuinterpretation der Gottes “Eigenschaften”*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr.
- KUGEL, J.L.
2017. *The great shift: Encountering God in biblical times*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- LACUGNA, C.M.
1985. Reconciling the Trinity as the mystery of salvation. *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 38: 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600041594>
1986. Making the most of Trinity Sunday. *Worship* 60: 210-24.
1989a. The baptismal formula, feminist objections and trinitarian theology. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26(2):235-50.
1989b. Can liturgy ever again become a source for theology? *Studia Liturgica* 19:1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003932078901900101>
1991a. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. New York: HarperCollins.
1991b. The trinitarian mystery of God. In: F.S. Fiorenza & J.P. Galvin (eds), *Systematic Theology vol 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress), pp. 151-92.
1992. The practical Trinity. *The Christian Century* 15-22 July:678-682.
1993. God in communion with us: The Trinity. C.M. LaCugna (ed.), *Freeing Theology: The essentials of theology in feminist perspectives* (New York: HarperCollins), pp. 83-114.
- LACUGNA, C.M. & DOWNEY, M.
1993. Trinitarian spirituality. In: M. Downey (ed.), *The new dictionary of Catholic spirituality* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press), pp. 968-982.
- LEVERING, M. & KALANTZIS, G.
2019. Why think about divine simplicity? *Modern Theology* 35(3):411-417. <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12507>
- LEWIS, T.J.
2020. *The origin and character of God: Ancient Israelite religion through the lens of divinity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190072544.001.0001>

LIENHARD, J.T.

1999. *Ousia and Hypostasis: The Cappadocian settlement and the theology of "One Hypostasis"*. In: S. Davis, D. Kendall & G. O'Collins (eds), *The Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 99-121. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199246122.003.0005>

LOUTH, A.

2012. Apophatic and cataphatic theology. In: A. Hollywood & P.Z. Beckman (eds), *The Cambridge companion to Christian mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 137-146. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139020886.008>

MACMULLEN, R.

2006. *Voting about God in the Early Church councils*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

MAIMELA, S.S.

1993. Black Theology and the quest for a God of liberation. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 82:54-66.

MALCOLM, L.

2002. The impossible God: An interview with David Tracy. *Christian Century* 13-20 February:24-30.

MANGANYI, J.S. & BUITENDAG, J.

2013. A critical analysis on African Traditional Religion and the Trinity. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 69(1), Art. #1934, 13 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i1.1934>.

2017. Perichoresis and Ubuntu within the African Christian context. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3), a4372. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4372>.

MARKL, D.

2020. The Babylonian exile as the birth trauma of monotheism. *Biblica* 101(1):1-25.

MBEMBE, A.J.

2016. Decolonizing the university: New directions. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15(1):29-45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022215618513>

MCGINN, B.M.

1991. *The foundations of mysticism: Origins to the fifth century*. New York: Crossroads.

MCGRATH, A.E.

2012. The cultivation of theological vision: Theological attentiveness and the practice of ministry. In: P. Ward (ed.), *Perspectives on ecclesiology and ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), pp.107-123.

McGUCKIN, J.A.

2011. The Trinity in the Greek Fathers. In: P.C. Phan (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 49-69. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521877398.004>

McINTOSH, M.A.

1998. *Mystical Theology: The integration of spirituality and theology*. Oxford: Blackwell.

2005. Trinitarian perspectives on Christian spirituality. In: A. Holder (ed.), *The Blackwell companion to Christian spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 177-189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/b.9781405102476.2005.00012.x>

MEEKS, M.D.

1989. *God the economist: The doctrine of God and political economy*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

MELTON, B.N.

2018. *Where is God in the Megilloth? A dialogue on the ambiguity of divine presence and absence*. Leiden: Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004368958>

MIGLIORE, D.L.

2014. *Faith seeking understanding*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

MILES, J.

1996. *God: A biography*. London: Simon & Schuster.

2001. *Christ: A crisis in the life of God*. London: William Heinemann.

MILLER, P.D.

1986. When the gods meet: Psalm 82 and the issue of justice. *Journal for Preachers* 9(4):2-5.

2000a. God and the gods: History of Religion as an approach and context for Bible and theology. In: Idem. *Israelite religion and biblical theology: Collected Essays* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), pp. 365-396.

2000b. *The religion of Ancient Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.

MITCHELL, M.M. & YOUNG, F.M. (EDS)

2006. *The Cambridge history of Christianity. Vol 1 Origins to Constantine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521812399>

MOLTMANN, J.

1967 *Theology of hope*. London: SCM.

1974. *The crucified God*. London: SCM. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004057367403100102>

1981. *The Trinity and the kingdom of God*. London: SCM.

1983. The reconciling power of the Trinity in the life of the church and the world. In: *Report – The reconciling power of the Trinity*. Occasional paper 15. (Geneva: Conference of European Churches), pp. 47-60.
2000. *Experiences in theology: Ways and forms of Christian theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
2010. *Sun of righteousness, arise! God's future for humanity and the earth*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- MUIS, J.**
2016. *Onze Vader: Christelijk spreken oor God*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum.
- NICHOLLS, D.**
1989. *Deity and domination: Images of God and the state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*. London: Routledge.
- NOLAN, A.**
1988. *God in South Africa: The challenge of the Gospel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- NOLL, K.L.**
2001. The kaleidoscopic nature of divine personality in the Hebrew Bible. *Biblical Interpretation* 9(1):1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851501300112335>
- NÜRNBERGER, K.**
2016. *Faith in Christ today: Invitation to systematic theology, vol. 2*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- ÖBERG, A.**
2021. Enervating the divine: Seeking new intuitions about God from a time of pandemic. *Open Theology* 7:140-149. <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0149>
- PALS, D.**
2021. *Ten theories of religion*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- PAPANIKOLAOU, A.**
2018. Trinity, virtue, and violence. In: M. Renaud & J. Daniel (eds), *God and the moral life* (London: Routledge), pp. 115-134. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315142975-8>
- PARRY, K. (ED.)**
2015. *The Wiley Blackwell companion to Patristics*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- PEACOCKE, J.**
1998. Heidegger and the problem of onto-theology. In: P. Blond (ed.), *Post-secular philosophy: Between philosophy and theology*. (London: Routledge), pp. 177-194.
- PERRIN, D.B.**
2005. Mysticism. In: A. Holder (ed.), *The Blackwell companion to Christian spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 442-458. <https://doi.org/10.1111/b.9781405102476.2005.00027.x>

- PETERSON, D.
2016. A sacred monster: On the secret fears of some recent trinitarianism. *A Journal for the Theology of Culture* 12(1):3-36.
- PETERSON, D.J.
2005. Speaking of God after the death of God. *Dialog* 44(3):207-226. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0012-2033.2005.00260.x>
- PLANTINGA, R.J., THOMPSON, T.R. & LUNDBERG, M.D. (Eds)
2010. *An introduction to Christian theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511800856>
- POHIER, J.
1986. *God – in fragments*. New York: Crossroad.
- POLKINGHORNE, J.
2004. *Science and the Trinity: The Christian encounter with reality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- POWER, D.N. & DOWNEY, M.
2012. *Living the justice of the triune God*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
- PRESTIGE, G.L.
1952. *God in patristic thought*. London: SPCK.
- QUERO, H.C. & GOH, J.N.
2018. More than a divine ménage à trois: Friendship, polyamory, and the doctrine of the Trinity. In: L. Isherwood & D. von der Horst (eds), *Contemporary theological approaches to sexuality* (London: Routledge), pp. 289-312. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315694238-25>
- RAHNER, K.
1971. Christian living formerly and today. In: K Rahner, *Theological investigations vol VII* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd), pp. 3-24.
1983. The hiddenness of God. In: K. Rahner, *Theological investigations vol XVI* (New York: Crossroads), pp. 227-243.
1997 (orig 1967). *The Trinity*. New York: Crossroad.
- RENAUD, M. & DANIEL, J. (Eds).
2018. *God and the moral life*. Oxfordshire: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315142975>
- RÖMER, T.
2015. *The invention of God*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674915732>
- SANDERS, E.P.
1991. *Paul*. Oxford University Press.
- SANDERS, F.
2001. Entangled in the Trinity: Economic and immanent Trinity in recent theology. *Dialog* 40(3):175-182. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0012-2033.00073>

SCHLEIERMACHER, F.

2016. *Christian faith*, vol. 1&2 (New translation – T.N. Tice, C.L. Kelsey, & E. Lawler). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.

SCHMID, K.

2019. *A historical theology of the Hebrew Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

SCHNEIDERS, S.M.

1989. Spirituality in the academy. *Theological Studies* 50:676-697. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398905000403>

SCHNELLE, U.

2009. *Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

2020. *The first one hundred years of Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

SCHRIJVERS, J.

2006. On doing theology “after” ontotheology: Notes on a French debate. *New Blackfriars* 87:302-314. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0028-4289.2006.00149.x>

SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, E.

1991. *Revelation: Vision of a just world*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

SCHÜSSLER-FIORENZA, F.

2005. Schleiermacher’s understanding of God as triune. In: J. Mariña (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp. 171-188. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521814480.010>

SHELDRAKE, P.F.

2010. *Explorations in spirituality: History, theology and social practice*. New York: Paulist Press.

SHULTS, F.R.

2005. *Reforming the doctrine of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

SIMMONS, J.A.

2008. God in recent French phenomenology. *Philosophy Compass* 3(5):910-932. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2008.00171.x>

SMIT, D.J.

2009. The Trinity in the Reformed Tradition. *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3:57-76. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156973109X403723>

SMITH, B.D.

2019. What Christ does, God does: Surveying recent scholarship on Christological monotheism. *Currents in Biblical Research* 17(2):184-208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X18814063>

SMITH, J.W.

2011. The Trinity in the fourth-century fathers. In: G. Emery & M. Levering (eds), *The Oxford handbook to the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 109-122. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199557813.003.0009>

SMITH, M.S.

2001. *The origins of biblical monotheism: Israel's polytheistic background and the Ugaritic texts*. Oxford; Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/019513480X.001.0001>

2002. *The early history of God: Yahweh and the other deities in ancient Israel*. 2nd Ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

SONDEREGGER, K.

2015. *Systematic Theology: The doctrine of God. vol 1*. Minneapolis: Fortress. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt12878k4>

2019. God. In: P.D. Jones & P.T. Nimmo (eds), *The Oxford handbook of Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 213-226. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199689781.013.14>

2020. *Systematic Theology: Doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Processions and persons. vol 2*. Minneapolis: Fortress. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvp2n55d>

STAHL, M.J.

2020. The "God of Israel" in Judah's Bible: Problems and prospects. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139(4):721-745. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jbl.2020.0042>

STENDAHL, K.

1976. Paul among Jews and gentiles. London: SCM.

TANNER, K.E.

2004. Trinity. In: P. Scott and W.T. Cavanaugh (eds), *The Blackwell companion to political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 319-332. <https://doi.org/10.1111/b.9780631223429.2003.00024.x>

2012. Social trinitarianism and its critics. In: R.J. Woźniak & G. Maspero (eds), *Rethinking trinitarian theology* (London: T & T Clark/Continuum), pp. 368-386.

TAYLOR, C.

1989. *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

THOMPSON, T.R.

1997. Trinitarianism today: Doctrinal renaissance, ethical relevance, social redolence. *Calvin Theological Journal* 32:9-42.

TONSTAD, L.M.

2016. *God and difference: The Trinity, sexuality, and the transformation of finitude*. New York, NY: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315675923>

TORRANCE, A.

2000. The Trinity. In: J. Webster (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Karl Barth*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 72-91. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521584760.005>

TRACY, D.

1994. The return of God in contemporary theology. *Concilium* 6/1994: 37-46.
1996. The hidden God: The divine other of liberation. *Cross Currents* 46(1):5-16.
1999. Trinitarian speculation and the forms of divine disclosure. In: S. Davis, D. Kendall & G. O' Collins (eds), *The Trinity: An interdisciplinary symposium on the trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 273-293. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199246122.003.0011>
2000. The hidden and the incomprehensible God. *Reflections* (3):62-88.
2002. The impossible God: An interview with David Tracy (by L. Malcolm). *Christian Century* 13-20 Febr:24-30.
- 2005a. Form and fragment: The recovery of the hidden and the incomprehensible God. In: W.G. Jeanrond & A. Lande (eds), *The concept of God in global dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), pp. 98-114.
- 2005b. Forms of divine disclosure. In: J.L. Heft (ed.), *Believing scholars: Ten Catholic intellectuals* (New York: Fordham University Press), pp. 47-57. <https://doi.org/10.5422/fso/9780823225255.003.0004>
2006. God: The Possible/Impossible. In: J.P. Manoussakis (ed.), *After God: Richard Kearney and the religious turn in continental philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press), pp. 340-354. <https://doi.org/10.5422/fso/9780823225316.003.0023>
2011. Approaching the Christian understanding of God. In: F. Schüssler Fiorenza, & J.P. Galvin (eds), *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress), pp. 109-129. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22nm83q.8>
2016. On suffering: The event of many forms. *Concilium* 3/2016:24-31.

TRACY, D., WESTPHAL, M. & ZIMMERMANN, J.

2016. Theism, atheism, anatheism: A panel discussion. In: R. Kearney & J. Zimmermann, (eds). *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney debates God*. (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 109-239.

VAN DE BEEK, A.

2017. *Mijn Vader, uw Vader: Het spreken over God de Vader*. Utrecht: Meinema.

VAN DEN BRINK, G.

2014. Social trinitarianism: A discussion of some recent theological criticisms *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16(3):331-350. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12053>

VAN DEN BRINK, G. & SAROT, M. (EDS)

- 1995a. *Hoe is uw naam? Opstellen over de eigenschappen van God*. Kampen: Kok.
- 1995b. De nieuwere wijsgerige theologie: Ter inleiding. In: Idem, *Hoe is uw naam? Opstellen over de eigenschappen van God* (Kampen: Kok), pp. 7-32.

- VAN DEN BRINK, G. & VAN ERP, S.
2009. Ignoring God triune? The doctrine of the Trinity in Dutch theology. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11(1):72-90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2400.2008.00424.x>
- VAN DEN BRINK, G. & VAN DER KOOI, C.
2012. *Christelike dogmatiek: Een inleiding*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum.
- VAN WYK, T.
2013. *Kerk as heterotopiese ruimte: 'n Trinitariese ekklesiologiese model vir die derde millennium*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- VENTER, R.
2018. Trinitarian theology and Richard Kearney's anatheism: An engagement. In: D.P. Veldsman & Y. Steenkamp (eds). *Debating Otherness with Richard Kearney: Perspectives from South Africa*. (Cape Town: AOSIS), pp. 237-251. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2018.BK94.11>.
2019. Reflections on Schleiermacher's God. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(4), a5556. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i4.5556>.
- VERHOEF, A.
2017. The relevance of continental philosophy of religion for theology in contemporary South Africa. *Acta Theologica* 37(2), 168-187. <https://doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.v37i2.10>.
2019. Post-structuralism and the Trinity: A reading of *The Brand New Testament*. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1), a5403. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5403>
- VOLF, M.
1998. "The Trinity is our social program": The doctrine of the Trinity and the shape of social engagement. *Modern Theology* 14(3):403-423. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0025.00072>
2006. Being as God is: Trinity and generosity. In: M. Volf & M. Welker (ed.), *God's life in Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress), pp. 3-12.
2021. Apophatic social trinitarianism: Why I continue to espouse "a kind of" social trinitarianism. *Political Theology* 22(5):407-422. DOI: 10.1080/1462317X.2021.1955576.
- VOSLOO, R.
2004. Identity, otherness and the triune God: Theological groundwork for a Christian ethic of hospitality. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 119: 69-89.
- WAETJEN, H.C.
2012. A postmodern reading of Paul's letter to the Romans and its disclosure of a new image of God and a new understanding of salvation. *Theology Today* 69(2):197-212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573612443538>

WEBB, S.H.

1996. *The gifting God: A trinitarian ethics of excess*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

WILDMAN, W.J.

2004. The Divine Action Project, 1988-2003. *Theology and Science* 2(1):31-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1474670042000196612>

WILKS, J.G.F.

1995. The trinitarian ontology of John Zizioulas. *Vox Evangelica* 25:63-88.

WILLIAMS, R.

2001. *Arius: Heresy and tradition*. rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

WOLTERSTORFF, N.P.

2006. Is there justice in the Trinity? In: M. Volf & M. Welker (eds), *God's life in Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress), pp. 177-187.

2008. *Justice: Rights and wrongs*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400828715>

2013. *Journey towards justice: Personal encounters in the global south*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

WRIGHT, C.J.H.

2004. *Old Testament ethics for the people of God*. Nottingham: IVP.

WRIGHT, N.T.

2013. *Paul and the faithfulness of God. Book 2*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

YOUNG, F.

2006. Monotheism and Christology. In: M.M. Mitchell & F.M. Young (eds), *The Cambridge history of Christianity. Vol 1 Origins to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 452-469. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521812399.027>

ZIZIOULAS, J.

1991. The doctrine of God the Trinity today: Suggestions for an ecumenical study. In: A.I.C. Heron (ed.), *The forgotten Trinity vol 3* (London: BCC/CCBI Inter-Church House), pp. 19-32.

1995. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The significance of the Cappadocian contribution. In: C. Schwöbel (ed.), *Trinitarian theology today: Essays on divine being and act* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), pp. 44-60.

2006. *Communion and Otherness: Further studies in personhood and the church*. London: T&T Clark.

2008. *Lectures in Christian dogmatics*. London: T&T Clark. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567705112>