

Conversations after God

Call for Papers

University of Pretoria – Protestant Theological University,

Amsterdam, 2018, 24 (23)-25 September

Cas Wepener and Marcel Barnard

FORMAL

What?

Conference in the framework of institutional cooperation Faculty of Theology University of Pretoria and Protestant Theological University

When and where?

Sunday 23 September (excursion), Monday September 24 – Tuesday September 25, Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam.

Guests from South Africa are invited to join in the Sunday excursion, titled ***Leaving Traces and Tracking Trails***, about 'the soul of Mokum'. This excursion will start at 2pm, and we will walk a straight line through the city from its oldest religious space, the Old Church, to the newer neighborhoods, tracing 'the soul of the city' under the guidance of one of our Research Master Students, Willem Jan Hek, who also is an architect.

CALL FOR PAPERS ON THEMES OF THE MEETING

You are invited to send proposals for papers to Marcel Barnard (mbarnard@pthu.nl) and Cas Wepener (Cas.Wepener@up.ac.za) before June 25th, 2018.

Papers should fit into the general framework of the cooperation project (see below), as well as preferably connect to one of the lines that have been developed in the former meetings of the project.

Please clearly indicate:

- title of your proposal
- how your proposal fits into the general framework of the project
- to which line within the project you connect and how you see the connection

LINES OF THOUGHT THAT HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED IN FORMER MEETINGS

The meeting of different disciplines has proved to be very inspiring in former meetings.

We therefore expect participants to join at least the Monday and Tuesday of the conference.

Within the framework of the project for the years 2012 – 2018 **the following lines** have been developed:

- the meaning of religious narratives, rituals and artifacts in the times after God
 - o papers were presented on the meaning of old church buildings as heterotopian space for 'ordinary' [basic, civil] liturgy in villages in the Netherlands;
 - o on artistic references to God with the dutch writer Joost Zwagerman, the British film director Jeremy Millar and the African writer Karel Schoeman
 - o on the yearly multimedia performance of The Passion in the Netherlands in a staging by popular artists with popular songs and broadcast on a national channel
- memorial and funeral cultures
 - o papers were presented on Freedom Park in Pretoria, which intends to be a memorial park for all who died in different wars that South Africans were engaged in;
 - o on (the theology of) grave stones in church yards in the northern part of the Netherlands
 - o on ritual-liturgical landscape concerning death in South Africa
 - o on death rituals in Afrikaans literature
 - o on cyber cemeteries
- post-dogmatics in the post-secular
 - o papers were presented on the thoughts and theology of Backford, Kearny, Jean-Luc Nancy and Catherine Keller
 - o on the affective-cognitive nature of our conversations after God, more specifically about the reasons of the heart before God, the self and the world
 - o on doing ethics in Africa
 - o on a revisited public theology
- and other topics

FRAMEWORK PROJECT 2012 – 2018

CONVERSATIONS AFTER GOD:

AFRICAN – EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES

ON THE THRESHOLDS OF THE MARKET PLACE.

The title may cause confusion, because the preposition 'after' has different meanings – 'past', 'in' and also 'according to'. This confusion is expressly aimed at and reflects late-modernity. The project aims at conversations that are aware of the present understanding of our times as era's after God, or even: after the gods. We ask after God in a situation after God, i.e. where concepts of God have lost their self-evidence, and we do so to attain a deeper understanding of who God is. We search for a deeper understanding from within the Christian tradition, which thinks of God as a Trinitarian God. This does not necessarily fill the concept of God, but it says, in a formal way, that God can be known by (the Spirit of) God as the one who made himself known in the Christ-event (Son, truly man and truly God), which is different from Himself (Father). This implies that knowledge of God goes together with knowledge of

humans, since the human is in God himself and because the Spirit works within the spirit of humans. The Christian tradition holds that human beings are *imagines Dei*. They stand in the huzzle and buzzle of life, but are not fully determined by their economic and social biotope.

Knowledge of the Trinitarian God goes together with knowledge of humans. The focus of the research is not so much the question who God is, but the question who the humans are? ***The project participates in the search for humans who stand coram Deo, before God, on the threshold of the marketplace.*** They stand in the huzzle and buzzle of life in which they are predominantly viewed from economic and scientific perspectives ***as imagines Dei, images of God.*** However, as God's images, they are eventually not determined by the economic and scientific biotope in which they are positioned and in which they position themselves. Facing the economic and natural-scientific monoculture they show themselves also different, making a difference, they are diverse and multicultural. In this regard, the nearly absolute separation between on the one hand the sciences and on the other hand theology and humanities is alarming. Even more alarming is the continuing power of the sciences at the expense of the humanities.

Technology is 'damn successful'. In the dominant discourse, truth is empirical truth. But the sciences carry a problematic discourse: humans are extremely vulnerable. The agenda of technology and the sciences is very dominant, in Europe as well as in Africa. But at the same time people allow other metaphors to play an important role in their lives. Religiosity, searching for meaning and the artistic make the difference and do by nature not participate in the dominant economic and scientific discourse (in this regard, we will have to watch for the caricature that Africa is religious and Europe is secularized). However, humans are also on the threshold of the market place and pulled in: there is an art trade in which huge amounts of money are transferred, developments in the church music are strongly influenced by the religious music industry, wellness is at the same time a commerce and religious, etc. Is it at all possible to escape the dominant discourse?

In different ways, daily life in Europe and in Africa is full of experiences of difference: we meet people with different views, of different races, languages, religions, cultures. The fact of the difference is more important than the content of the differences: the *form* of living-together prevails over its *content*. 'Flow' appears to be a strong metaphor to understand the network society and wired world. How does this flow affect theological anthropology and practices of faith in North and South? In the network society information is the important thing, but not primarily the content of the information. In the network society, characterized by a constant flow of information, money, people etc, all centrism (Eurocentrism, ethnocentrism etc.) are surpassed. The big city is the icon of this tendency. In the informational network society the city is a vital knot where labor, knowledge, values, cultural heritage and people are exchanged. We therefore see a physical movement to the city, a migration of people from the countryside to the cities; more than half the world population now lives in cities.

People in Africa and Europe live in the same wired or connected world, but at the same time, people are firmly rooted in local places and identities (Castells). Life in cities, as well as life elsewhere in the world, is not uniform; maps of cities and the world map show zones of exclusion and inclusion. As Manuel Castells says, big parts of the world, large groups of people or even complete nations, are disconnected and are underprivileged. The countryside, where people come from, impoverishes, although in Europe an urban lifestyle can also be found in the rural areas.

Where, all too simply put, the countryside is monocultural, the city is a meeting place, a place of possibilities, schools of experience of pluralism, difference etc. The fact that you are staying in the city, allows you exposure and the question is: can you develop it into something positive? We consider that the dynamics between the urban and rural in both Africa and Europe and in a connected network society have significant effects on the development of Christianity. What is the impact of this process on theology? What is the role of theology in it? And do the existing church models reflect this tendency of urbanization (the suspicion is that they are rural in shape).

People have the ability to transcend their biotope. From a theological perspective, one therefore has to maintain that late-modern humans stand *on the thresholds* of the marketplace. The threshold is a position 'betwixt and between', it is a *liminal* position (Victor Turner). People on the threshold belong to both and neither. To both, because in our meeting in which this program was prepared, we also had to admit that, as a rule, we feel very well at home in the marketplace. The economic monoculture is not necessarily in contradiction with difference, diversity and multicultural tendencies. Globalization evokes localization; connectedness evokes rootedness; fluidity evokes solidity; liquid identities evoke 'resistance identities' (Castells) and the question seem to be how humans cope with the supposed tension of these pairs of concepts. Late-modern people on the one hand struggle with these tensions, but on the other hand appear to cope easily with them. They live in the *global village*, in virtual networks that at the same time provide unity and diversity. The rural, urban, virtual and global are intermingled in new and complex alliances. It is however our suspicion that the multicultural, exotic and particular, the localized, rootedness, solidity and resistance identity are only allowed as long as they do not criticize the dominant global financial and economic culture.

In the framework of our conversations it should be kept in mind that north – south dialogues are part of the economic paradigm, of sales techniques: the northern market seems to be saturated – especially the northern theological market – and now the southern market is being explored anew. The dominant narrative limits and determines also the knowledge that we acquire in the proposed project. We should publish in peer-reviewed international journals; we should internationalize, - etc. What has theology to say of the dominant discourse? How does theology relate to the dominant discourse and which critical questions have theology for this discourse, which alternatives does theology propose? However, the dominant discourse also determines the collaborative of UP and PThU: knowledge and money are closely connected.