

Abstracts of larger monographs

1967 Glaube und Religion bei Karl Barth (Faith and Religion in Karl Barth's theology). For bibliographical detail see List of Publications.

[Key terms: Karl Barth – human religion and divine revelation – dialectical theology.]

This is my doctoral thesis in Systematic Theology at Marburg University. An analysis of paragraph 17 of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics reveals that in his early work Barth developed a highly structured dialectic: God's revelation in Christ as a thesis is juxtaposed with human religion as an antithesis. Human religion is, by definition, inauthentic, whether it is Christian or non-Christian. But when human religion is made the medium of God's revelation, it becomes authentic, just as the sinner is justified by grace. The thesis closes with a critique of Barth's position on the basis of a Lutheran approach.

1975 Sistematiese Teologie (Systematic Theology). For bibliographical detail see List of Publications.

[Key terms: South African theology – law and gospel - existential theology]

In the 1970s, Afrikaans-speaking Lutheran churches and seminaries published a number of text books in the Afrikaans language. I was requested to contribute volume 20 on Systematic Theology. It was the first full Systematic Theology ever to be published in South Africa, thus also the first to be published in the Afrikaans language. It follows a typically Lutheran existentialist approach to theology, based on the juxtaposition of law and gospel. The different chapters deal with the Word of God, the task of theology, the sacraments, law and gospel, creation, sin, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, mission, eschatology, and the doctrine of God.

1982 Die Relevanz des Wortes im Entwicklungsprozess (The relevance of the Word of God in the process of economic development). For bibliographical detail see List of Publications.

[Key terms: Economic development – Christian social engagement – ecology].

My passion throughout my career was to witness to Christ in a way that makes sense and that leads to transformation in the real contexts of life. As an academic theologian I attempted to integrate the insights of the social sciences with those of theology. This book is my first major attempt to establish a link between theology and economics – a theme that has characterised much of my later work. I depart from the observation that existential motivations and social processes are based on clusters of ultimate assumptions that have the power to lead personal decision making and social behaviour in particular directions. The proclaimed Word of God is one of these clusters and such the foundation of Christian existence. If proclaimed appropriately it will get into confrontation with other such clusters and impact decisions and behaviour. This approach is then applied to three models of economic development: modernisation, liberation and ecological equilibrium. The book dates back to a guest lecture held in Berlin in 1974/5. It was submitted as a doctoral thesis in Theological Ethics at the University of South Africa and recognised by German faculties as a 'Habilitationsschrift'.

1987 Ethik des Nord-Süd-Konflikts: Das globale Machtgefälle als theologisches Problem (Ethics of the North-South conflict: Global power discrepancies as a theological problem). For bibliographical detail see List of Publications..

[Key terms: Economic development – Christian social engagement – ecology]

This book dates back to a guest lecturership at the University of Bochum (Germany) in 1982. It develops a multifaceted model of the dynamics which underlie the escalating discrepancies between economic centres and economic backwaters in the global economy. The model integrates structural factors with differences in collective consciousness. It also reflects on the relation between religious conviction and interest-induced ideology. It then proposes a theological approach that would be capable of addressing such a multi-faceted phenomenon in a holistic way. God is the power (source) but also the meaning (destiny) of reality. To find solutions, confrontations with other convictions are inescapable. This insight is spelt out in terms of modernity and traditionalism, dominance and dependence, collective interests and ideology. The book closes with a strategy of structural change.

1988 Power and Beliefs in South Africa: Economic potency structures in South Africa and their interaction with patterns of conviction in the light of a Christian ethic. For bibliographical detail see List of Publications..

[Key terms: South African economy – apartheid - collective consciousness – ideology]

This study is an empirical analysis of the South African economy and its relation to the ideological landscape under apartheid. Commissioned by the South African Human Sciences Research Council, it presented the author with the opportunity to substantiate his multi-dimensional model of economic discrepancies with concrete evidence. The book analyses the relation between economic power structures and patterns of conviction found in the South African society at the time. The first part shows that the South African economy constituted an extreme example of centre-periphery dynamics. The situation was not caused, but vastly acerbated by the racial policies of the regime. The second part analyses prevalent patterns of collective consciousness in South African society at the time and correlates them with the respective locations of groups in the social system. Liberal leanings changed to socialist leanings, for instance, once a certain income threshold was reached. The book closes with a theological-ethical critique of the syndrome and a theological-ethical approach towards its resolution.

1998 Beyond Marx and Market: Outcomes of a century of economic experimentation. For bibliographical detail see List of Publications.

[Key terms: Capitalism – socialism – Marxism-Leninism].

This book presents an accessible and lucid overview of the strengths and weaknesses of free enterprise capitalism and its socialist counterpart, Marxism-Leninism, social democracy and democratic socialism. It analyses the value assumptions of liberalism and socialism respectively, indicates desirable policy directions for the future and closes with a reflection on faith and economic reality. Readers have generally found it to be a simple and informative guide through the maze of economic systems and ideologies.

1999 Prosperity, Poverty and Pollution: Managing the approaching crisis. For bibliographical detail see List of Publications.

[Key terms: Economic discrepancies – economic development – ecological sustainability – new economics].

This is my final statement in the field global economic processes and dysfunctions. An economist reviewer called it “a comprehensive and masterly analysis”. It presents a holistic, interdisciplinary approach to the syndrome that is both local and global in orientation and that is based on a vast and worldwide pool of evidence.

In Part I the model of economic structures found in earlier works is fully developed. Their multi-dimensional causes and their impact on the natural environment are spelt out.

In Part II the author deals with the transformation of collective consciousness. This includes the role of religious convictions, the clash between traditionalism and modernity, the dependency syndrome, collective interests and ideology.

In Part III an inter-disciplinary paradigm is drawn up which is meant to replace the totally inadequate view of mainline economics. A rare feature is the application of insights gleaned from the natural sciences (entropy and evolution) to the global economic and ecological scene.

In Part VI proposals for concrete interventions are made for centres, peripheries and the interaction between them.

The book breaks through the self-imposed blinkers of classical economics towards a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach to the syndrome of growing economic discrepancies and ecological deterioration.

2003 Zuspruch des Seinsrechts: Verstellt die Lehre die Sache? (Bestowal of the right to be: does the doctrine obstruct the gospel?). For bibliographical detail see List of Publications.

(For an English abstract see below.)

[Key terms: Rechtfertigungslehre - Rechtfertigung – Gesetz und Evangelium – Gesetzlichkeit - Kirchengemeinschaft].

Die Diskussion um die Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre von 1999 hat wieder einmal offenbart, wie unverständlich unsere Theologie für das Kirchenvolk und die säkulare Welt geworden ist. Wenn man das Evangelium von rechtlichen Kategorien in Gemeinschaftskategorien übersetzt, heisst Rechtfertigung des Sünders: Gottes bedingungslose, leidende, zurechtbringende Annahme des Unannehmbaren in seine Gemeinschaft. Das Gleichnis vom verlorenen Sohn weist uns den Weg. In dieser Form verkündet und gelebt, entfaltet das Evangelium sofort eine umfassende und eingreifende Relevanz. Im ersten Teil zeichne ich an meinem Lebensweg im sozialen Konfliktfeld Südafrikas nach, wie das so verstandene Evangelium immer wieder zur entscheidenden, heilenden, lebensverändernden Glaubensgewissheit geworden ist.

Im zweiten Teil ziehe ich die systematisch-theologische Konsequenzen aus diesen Einsichten aus. Der rechtliche Rahmen der Rechtfertigungslehre hat auch Lutheraner zur Vergesetzlichung des Evangeliums und also zur Gesetzlichkeit verführt. Lutheraner können zum Beispiel nicht die Annahme ihrer (alles begründenden) Lehre von Gottes bedingungsloser Annahme des Unannehmbaren zur Bedingung der Annahme Anderer machen, ohne sich selbst ad absurdum zu

führen. Ausschluss Anderer vom Abendmahl auf Grund dogmatischer Erwägungen ist ein gutes Beispiel. Die lutherische Gewissheit, dass Gerechtigkeit Folge, nicht Voraussetzung der Annahme Gottes ist, kann nicht nur auf moralisch verstandene Sünden angewandt werden, sondern muss auch falsche oder mangelhafte theologische Einsicht einschliessen. Das hat für ökumenische Gemeinschafts- und Einheitsbestrebungen entscheidende Konsequenzen: Einheit kann nicht auf Konsens gebaut werden, weil sie vom Evangelium grade trotz der Unterschiede proklamiert und also in Christus immer schon vorgegeben ist. Am Anfang unseres gemeinsamen Weges steht das Fest, nicht die dogmatische Diskussion. Das Ringen um angemessene theologische Formulierungen ist nicht Voraussetzung, sondern Folge von Gottes bedingungsloser Annahme. Diese können auch keine zeitlose und situationsenthobene Gültigkeit beanspruchen, sondern müssen dem geschichtlichen Fluss alles Wirklichen und der Breite kontextueller Nöte gerecht werden. Das Buch dürfte einen radikalen Ansatz zum Problem der Rechtfertigung darstellen, der die bisherige lutherische Praxis zutiefst in Frage stellt.

English abstract of the same book

[Key terms: Justification by faith – church unity – legalism – law and gospel - South Africa].

After decades of negotiations, a Joint Catholic-Lutheran Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was published in 1999. 150 German professors of theology demanded that the agreement be rejected by Lutheran churches. Their argument was: justification is the basis of the church in Protestantism from which everything else is to be derived; in Catholicism the basis of the church is episcopal authority while justification remains tangential. The Declaration has changed nothing in the relationship between the two churches. These developments agitated me so deeply that I had to write a book. I sensed that the assumptions on which the discussions were based undermined the deeper meaning of the doctrine. The book has two major objectives:

1. It attempts to give an answer to the question, how can this doctrine possibly function as the basis of the church if it is (as the Declaration once again demonstrated) so abstract that only a few experts know what to do with it? More importantly, how can its indigestible logic be made sufficiently lucid to make sense to ordinary people? A gospel that nobody understands cannot be good news. In the book I translate the doctrine from a legal frame of reference to a communal frame of reference, rendering it as “God’s suffering, redeeming, transforming acceptance of the unacceptable into his fellowship”.

This version, gleaned from the parable of the prodigal son, immediately opens up vast and tantalizing horizons of relevance. In the first part of the book I show how the experience of unconditional acceptance made all the difference for life in our conflict-ridden South African environment. Eucharistic exclusions, cultural clashes, racial discrimination, ideological conflict, denominational intolerance, the handicap of poverty, ostracism of the HIV-infected and affected, the challenge of science to faith and the afflictions of old age are discussed. As far as I can see, this kind of biographical account of the relevance of the doctrine is without parallel in the literature.

2. Deep going doctrinal reflections on these experiences follow in the second part of the book. If God’s unconditional, redeeming, transforming acceptance of the unacceptable is the point of departure from which everything else has to follow,

this must have the most far-reaching repercussions for ecumenical encounters and the unity of the church. Lutherans especially, who consider God's unconditional acceptance of the unacceptable to be the basis of the church, cannot possibly pose conditions of acceptance, whether ecclesial, moral or doctrinal. Acceptance comes first, the struggle for doctrinal clarity follows from that, not the other way round. We cannot want to achieve unity; it is the gospel of God's acceptance of the unacceptable that proclaims us to be one in Christ. Sharing God's suffering acceptance of the unacceptable, we bear each other's burdens, as Christ has borne ours, including the burden of doctrinal differences. It is on this basis that we are able to support, enrich and correct each other. The book presents a radical approach to the problem of justification, an approach that challenges Lutheran practice to go back to its very foundations.

2002 Theology of the Biblical Witness: An evolutionary approach. For bibliographical detail see List of Publications.

[Key terms: Biblical theology – biblical hermeneutics – evolutionary hermeneutics – relevance of the biblical faith]]

In my work on socio-economic processes, I painfully recognised the irrelevance of traditional forms of the Christian faith for this highly complex cluster of problems – a cluster of problems which will determine the very future of humankind. Is the Christian faith indeed, as it claims to be, a redemptive faith? If not, is the cause really to be sought in its foundational traditions, the biblical scriptures, or in our truncated views of what the biblical faith is all about?

For over a decade I struggled with this question. Eventually I came up with the following picture. The Word of God has been, and always is, God's redemptive response to human situations of need. Beginning with the modest needs of a nomadic clan, this response had acquired universal dimensions by the end of biblical history. God's vision of comprehensive well-being for his entire creation had become the overriding metanorm: a new heart, a new body, a new community, a new family of nations, a new natural world, a new heaven and earth. This vision implies that any deficiency in well-being in any dimension of life is the target of God's immediate redemptive concern, thus of our concern as his representatives and instruments in this world. Jesus tackled human needs as they presented themselves and expected us to do the same.

What then happened in biblical history? The Bible does not provide us with an abstract dogmatic system, but contains a series of narratives of God's redemptive interventions. These narratives formed traditions which were remembered in new situations of need. Having to adapt to these ever different situations over a whole millennium of ancient history, they were lured into a process of evolutionary change. This process is ideally headed towards an ever more appropriate conception of God's redemptive intentions, but it does not always work out that way. There are also setbacks.

This discovery has profound consequences for biblical hermeneutics and the canonicity of the Scriptures, which I spell out in the first part of the book. Single texts, for instance, may not be absolutised. They are provisional manifestations of an ongoing and evolutionary undercurrent of meaning which culminates in the Christ event and which is heading towards God's eschatological future.

In the second part I analyse the trajectories of 6 paradigms of redemption on the basis of these insights: the promise to the Fathers, exodus and conquest, king and

empire, priesthood and sacrifice, covenant and law, creation and new creation. In each of these cases the original meaning gradually turns on its head: human sacrifice of the first-born to God, for instance, changes into God's sacrifice of his only-born to humanity. Similarly, the legitimation of authoritarian rule found in Psalm 2 turns into the servanthood of the messianic king in Mark 10:35-45. This again has immediate implications for contemporary society: authoritarian rule is no longer legitimate on the basis of the biblical faith. Rulers are meant to be servants of the ruled – a demand that finds institutional expressions in a democratic system of governance.

Theologically one can say that God entered human history to transform it from within. The Word of God became flesh, human reality, part of human history, not only in Christ, but also in the events leading up to the Christ event and in the events following upon the Christ-event.

For hermeneutics this means that single texts taken out of their historical contexts cannot claim to be canonical. One always has to ask what has gone before and what has followed – and what is therefore the direction we have to follow into the future if we want to remain true to the ongoing dynamic of the undercurrent of meaning. This approach makes it possible to account for the immense diversity and the constant flux of insight found in the Bible, without losing the underlying thrust of the message. It also gives us the courage to do for our times what the biblical authors have done for theirs. What is God's redemptive response, for instance, to world poverty and the ecological crisis?

Assessors have deemed this to be one of the most challenging approaches to biblical interpretation to have emerged in recent years.

2004 Biblical Theology in Outline – The vitality of the Word of God. For bibliographical detail see List of Publications..

[Key terms: Biblical theology – biblical interpretation – biblical history – biblical critique - relevance of the Bible]

That the Bible presents immense problems to the laity is hardly an overstatement. Believers are caught between the doctrinal assumption that the Bible is God's eternal Word which cannot contain errors, and their own observation that there are obscure, contradictory and highly problematic passages in the Bible. They may discover that there exists a wide variety of faith assumptions in the Bible which do not always dovetail with each other. There are texts which do not seem to reflect a loving God, for instance the hatred of enemies in the Psalms, the genocidal attitude of Israel towards the original inhabitants of Palestine, the legitimation of patriarchal dominance, or the imperial claims of Israelite kings (Ps 2). Some of these assumptions are ethically untenable from a Christian perspective and offensive to modern sensitivities.

With the historical approach to biblical interpretation that I have developed in *Theology of the Biblical Witness* (see above), these phenomena sort themselves out and begin to make sense. I was concerned, however, that the scholarly character of the book would not be accessible to the educated laity. So I wrote a simplified version with the aim of distributing it more widely. It has the same chapters but in a simple non-technical language. Experience so far suggests that lay readers, lay preachers and first year students, but also ministers in the field who battle with biblical interpretation, can benefit greatly from this book.

2005 Martin Luther's message for us today: A perspective from the South. For bibliographical detail see List of Publications..

[Key terms: Reformation theology – Martin Luther – experiential theology – Lutheran theology in Africa]

Books on Luther can fill a substantial library. Why add another one? My answer is that Luther is the prototype of a contextual theologian with extraordinary depth of insight. He does not speculate about God but formulates God's response to the unfolding situation of his time. But this situation was located in the West half a millennium ago. That is probably why Western accounts of Luther's theology are not likely to rouse the enthusiasm of Southern readers.

This book changes all that. Just as Martin Luther's work reflects his response to the challenges and predicaments of 16th century Europe, rather than engaging in metaphysical speculations, this book reflects my interpretation of Luther's theology in response to the conflicts and predicaments we had to face during the last three decades of Southern African history. It is not meant to do justice to a historical figure, but to retrieve the profound insights of the Reformer for our situation today – and do so critically.

The chapters deal with the following insights: The Word of God is light in the darkneses of life; faith is trust in God's promise; predestination must make way for God's open future; the Scriptures are authoritative in as far as they witness to Christ; the gospel does not lead to a new enslavement to the law, but to freedom and responsibility; the church is composed of those who have been unconditionally and redemptively accepted by God into his fellowship; the ministry is not meant to be elevated above the laity but to empower the priesthood of all believers; through baptism the community accepts the baptised into God's fellowship; in the Lord's Supper Christ gives himself to us here and now as he gave himself on the cross for us; God's rule overcomes sin and evil, whether in our hearts through his Word, or in society through institutions and offices; confession refers to the foundations of faith, while prophesy challenges social evils; the gospel of unconditional, transforming acceptance is the foundation of an appropriate response to the HIV pandemic.

All these are momentous insights in momentous times. They show that, properly interpreted, Luther's experiential theology can help us overcome impasses created by an outdated metaphysics and deal more appropriately with the challenges of today.

2007 The living dead and the living God: Christ and the ancestors in a changing Africa. (See list of publications).

[Key terms: African religion – ancestor veneration – traditionalism and modernity – mission in Africa – living dead]

It is well known that ancestor veneration, belief in spirits and traditional approaches to healing play a significant role in mainline churches in many parts of the world. Because such beliefs are usually hidden or repressed, they are causing agonies of conscience and theological confusion among lay members and church leaders alike. We must take this dimension of spiritual reality more seriously, overcome prejudices and taboos, bring secret practices into the open and find theological solutions to the underlying problems.

Having worked in a predominantly African church for a considerable time of my life, I have taken a keen interest in the relation between African spirituality and the

Christian faith. I have also worked extensively on the basic assumptions of modernity and its socio-economic consequences.

Concern for cultural identity is certainly not irrelevant. But culture is not something static. Modernity has hurled us into a process of accelerating change in all spheres of life. Theology appears to have been left behind at the airport, while the Jumbo is roaring away. That is why the book has two parts: one on traditionalism, focusing on submission to authority, the other on modernity, focusing on rejection of authority.

In the first part I listen to African spirituality, the biblical witness and the Reformation. My conclusion is that the missionary gospel did not respond adequately to African spiritual needs. Because Christ is remote ancestors continue to be the last resort in times of crisis. In the second part I listen to modernity and postmodern trends. I argue that traditionalism is an obstacle to the modern urge to conquer the future rather than preserving the past.