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Philosophy and theology: Reviews from Stellenbosch – Proposals from Paris?

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Abstract

The contributions of "the turn to religion" in continental philosophy have begun to find their place in South African theological and philosophical circles. This article asks: how are we to position this phenomenon in the South African context and what implications it might have for the future of systematic theology? After situating the "turn to religion" in general, the article traces the historical development of philosophy's creative relationship to theology by focusing on three representatives from the Stellenbosch tradition: the theologian Johannes du Plessis, the philosopher J.F. Kirsten, as well as the philosopher, Johann Degenaar. It argues that the relationship between philosophy and theology cultivated in these figures is characterized by what can be called the "propaedeutic" model, whereby theology is subjected to a "preparation" by philosophy. This model raises questions about the "use" of philosophy in contemporary systematic theology within the context of the secular academy and an ever-pluralizing world. The article suggests that recent debates in the continental "turn" are uniquely positioned to help reflect on such questions of methodology, and to this end makes a tentative proposal drawing on the philosophical-theological approach developed by the French thinker, Emmanuel Falque.

Keywords

Stellenbosch philosophy; J.F. Kirsten, Johann Degenaar; Emmanuel Falque; theology; phenomenology

I

If one were to visit the 6th *arrondissement* in the heart of Paris, there one will find the Luxembourg Gardens, and straddled on either side, two famous institutions: *L'institut catholique de Paris* and the Sorbonne, residing in the 5th *arrondissement*. The physical distance between them must be no more than a kilometre, but within the context of the academy one can read this separation metaphorically in terms of French *laïcité*; that is, the rigorous secular distinction between philosophy and theology, according to which the latter remains confined to the private sphere while the former takes on the priority of the public.[1] Tracing the history of this separation between philosophy and theology is not of direct interest for what follows, but rather its more immediate emergence as a discreet area of reflection in the phenomenon now well-known as the "turn to religion" in continental philosophy; and more specifically, how the debates within this turn might raise the need for reviews and revisions of the nature of this relationship within the South African context.

For the purposes of this article, this will be a matter of beginning to think about the discipline of theology *as such* and to do so by thematizing its relationship to philosophy as it's infamous yet intimate other. To an investigation which raises questions of methodological complexion and which asks after the possibility of disciplinary boundaries, some may retort that such a project is of a Eurocentric origin and should have little to do with the pressing concerns of the South African theologian. But for both *historical* and *theological* reasons such a view should be rejected, since it is precisely in the worst of cases that an ignorance of theology's philosophical premises can have devastating consequences. In being precise about these influences, acknowledging their sources and by considering their implications, only then can the imperative for theology's self-critical understanding come into view. Thus, what follows will be far from deriding philosophy or its applications by theology, nor will it be that theology should be disinterested with philosophy, nor, further still, that it could even avoid doing so. Rather, what is being aimed at here is the very framing

1 See Bradley Onishi, "Philosophy *and* Theology: Emmanuel Falque and the New Theological Turn" in Bruce Ellis Benson and B. Keith Putt (eds.) *Evil, Falleness, and Finitude* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2017), 100.

of theology's relationship to philosophy. In this case, it is not only about situating philosophy's "proper" place and acknowledging its commitments, but also about theology's own character as a discipline within the academy.

The article will therefore proceed in three sections: First, it begins by contextualizing the "turn to religion" in continental philosophy with remarks on the Anglo-American tradition of the "death of God" movement of the 1960's, as well as the important parallel tradition of French phenomenological theology. These historical moments reflect the ongoing struggle between the secular and the religious and make possible a brief series of broad methodological proposals for the way in which to render the relationship between philosophy and theology. While these proposals can be (and are) further thematized with ever greater detail, the argument is that if one is to consider "reconstructing" the history of systematic theology in South Africa,[2] then such thematizations are prudent insofar as they offer an orientation from which to assess this history. Thus, in the second section, it is argued that parts of the historical development of the "Stellenbosch tradition" of philosophy and theology, lend themselves to a particular model: what will be called the use of philosophy as a "propaedeutic" to theology. By considering at length three of its important figures, including Johannes du Plessis, J.F. Kirsten, and Johan Degenaar, it is claimed that what prevails as theology within this philosophical context is rather a *hermeneutic* of Christianity, whereby the theological encounter with philosophy leads to the former's appropriation of the latter. The critical qualifier here is the "hermeneutic" interpretation given to Christianity as opposed to a philosophy that begins with expressly Christian epistemological commitments, that is, the religious *a priori* that serves as a regulative function for both philosophical and theological investigation. The approach followed here then would be distinguishable from a Plantinga-styled Christian philosophy[3] or certain elements of

2 A version of this article was first delivered virtually at the Theological Society of South Africa on 1st July 2021, in response to the conference theme: "The decolonial turn and reconstructing the history of systematic theology in South Africa."

3 For Plantinga, Christian commitments supersede philosophical commitments within the *practice of philosophy*, such that philosophy is ultimately subordinated to Christian practice. This Plantinga-type philosophy, Anselmian in its roots, in general regards *faith as the condition for understanding*, as opposed to a *Thomistic* view: from which an embodied understanding becomes the framework out of which faith gets articulated

the Reformational philosophy, for example, in the work of H.G. Stoker (1899–1993) or Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977).[4] In the third and final section, some questions and concerns are raised about what consequences the hermeneutical interpretation of Christianity might have for theology. The suggestion is made that contemporary systematic theology's appropriation of hermeneutic philosophy can lead not only to an uncritical colonization of philosophy, but also consequently compromise theology's contribution. Finally, a constructive proposal is made by turning to the French philosopher-theologian Emmanuel Falque. Following his recent "discourse on method", *Crossing the Rubicon* (2016),[5] a relationship of inclusive confrontation – yet with the respect for difference – is imagined in such a way as to maintain theology's "credibility" (*credible* as opposed to *croyable*)[6] to a secular audience. Falque accomplishes this without losing theology's distinctive character, while at the same time drawing upon but not sublimating philosophy, and thus facilitating a genuine encounter with both on equal terms. The latter, and indeed all the preceding discussions are intended to begin a conversation whose theme has largely gone unnoticed in recent South African systematic theology. It is thus an attempt to think about the shape of systematic theology's past (from the perspective of philosophy) so as to be prepared for the challenges of living in a future that accommodates both the religious and the non-believer.

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as a unique alternative knowing. There is a "postmodern" affirmation of difference in Reformed Epistemology, since everyone starts philosophizing "from where they are" (in this case the Christian position of faith), but saying that Christian philosophy begins with a confessional starting point does not mean that it is equally philosophically viable.

4 This citational admission indicates a vast corpus of literature in the domain of "Reformational Philosophy" or "Christian Philosophy" that will not be addressed by this essay, but which should be recognized for the role it has played in the context of South African philosophical and theological history. For an introduction to the relationship between philosophy and theology in this tradition see Renato Coletto, "Theology and Philosophy: the controversies regarding their nature and role in the Reformational Tradition." *Tydskrif vir Christelike Wetenskap* 45 no. 3 (2009): 97–155. See Pieter Duvenage, *Afrikaanse filosofie: Perspektiewe en dialoë* (Blomfontein: SUN Press, 2016). It also admits that the less prevalent traditions of analytic and "African" philosophy (a contested term) too, exceed the scope of this article in terms of their relationship to theology.

5 Emmanuel Falque, Reuben Shank (trans.), *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

6 Emmanuel Falque, George Hughes (trans.), *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 43-44.

II

One can begin a discussion of the continental turn to religion in philosophy by referring again to France and the unique influence of her thinkers in the Anglo-American world. Post-war France in the 50s and 60s, was marked by a distinctly anti-religious post-Heideggerian existentialism, structuralist, and later post-structuralist philosophies of difference, which reached their zenith, arguably, in the expressions of Michel Foucault, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida. Thus, while in the United States the iconic "Is God Dead?" pronouncement donning the front cover of *Time* in 1966 was supposed to raise the question of an epochal shift in which God might recede from cultural consciousness, one could say that in France God had already been dead for quite some time. Nevertheless, the traditional theisms that were put under intense scrutiny by the likes of Gabriel Vahanian, Thomas Altizer, William Hamilton, and Richard Rubenstein in the death-of-God movement, meant that the ground was suitably well-toiled for another generation of thinkers. Here it was during the '80s that Anglophone philosophers like Mark C. Taylor and his Erring (1984), Kevin Hart and his *Trespass of the Sign* (1989), and John Caputo's *Radical Hermeneutics* (1987), all began to detect and appropriate the insights of post-structuralism; in particular, the resonances of Judeo-Christian thought in the work of Derrida. Into the '90s these thinkers including philosophers and theologians alike began to further see the fecundity of recognizing Derrida and supposedly other secular-atheist continental philosophers as allies for articulating what would become a "postmodern theology" prepared to defend the plausibility of God after the proclamation of his death. With this "turn to religion" from the insights garnered from philosophy, the sub-field of *continental philosophy of religion* was born, later developing into what would now be called "Radical Theology."[7]However, back in France, and emerging from the Second Vatican Council, as well as the May 68 protests and its systematic denunciation of authority and conformity, the general tenor was that the French Catholic Church was out of step with the prevailing secular humanism that dominated intellectual

7 See Christopher D. Rodkey and Jorden E. Miller (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

and public life.[8] For many professing Catholic philosophers, this was not the time to invoke Rahnerian notions of openness and dialogue, but to present a defence of Catholic identity that would not capitulate to the growing encroachment of modernity and to do so explicitly, so they claimed, on philosophical grounds.[9] Embedded in this cultural war, this generation of philosophers would seek to defend a theo-logic through the means of a phenomenological philosophy, and it was against such figures, including Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and Michel Henry, that the philosopher Dominique Janicaud would famously direct his criticism for corrupting the phenomenological method in service of theological ends – in what was then called the "theological turn in phenomenology."[10] As these philosophers works began to be translated throughout the 90s and subsequent decade, their popularity and influence increased predominantly in Anglophone-speaking countries, as the hopes for a renewed relationship between philosophy and theology after the death of God seemed to take hold. This unique moment of coincidence between the generative work in continental philosophy and theology, at least in its French and American iterations, reached its culmination arguably in the famous roundtable discussion between Marion and Derrida held at Villanova University in 1997, and later published under the title *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (1999).[11] While there were several subsequent touchpoints – for example, the similarities of negative theology's evasive language to name God and philosophical descriptions of transcendence – the underlying dividend of these debates was to ignite both an intimate discussion of the nature of

8 Bradley B. Onishi, "Is the Theological Turn Still Relevant? Finitude, Affect, Embodiment" in Emmanuel Falque, Lucas McCracken (trans.) *The Loving Struggle: Phenomenological and Theological Debates* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), xiv–xix.

9 The story here is somewhat more complex, for many of these philosophers influenced by Hans Urs von Balthasar, were not simply anti-modernist, but rather represented a kind of neo-Orthodoxy (opposed to traditionalism) that would make use of the method of *Ressourcement* ("return to the sources") to address postmodern concerns. For the influence of Balthasar, see Jean-Luc Marion, *The Rigor of Things: Conversations with Dan Arbib, trans.* Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 22–26.

10 See Donimique Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

11 See John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.), *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

religion and secularity, as well as to offer a philosophical apologetic for belief in God, at least in the case of Marion and a quasi-faith in the case of Derrida. The debate concerning the nature of religion and secularity would thus predominantly be held in departments of religious studies and philosophy, while in theology, the contribution to confessional faith would be unmistakable as the themes of revelation, liturgy, and sin, were directly brought into conversation with phenomenological notions of excess, the Other, saturation, and human finitude, albeit in a mode which supposedly "overcame" the Heideggerian onto-theological critique.

What is to be drawn from these highlights is the growing paucity of disciplinary boundaries which has come to characterize aspects of secularity within the academy and which, crucially, has again induced much debate about how to relate philosophy and theology.[12] As alluded, the turn to religion in continental philosophy has become the crucial source of this enriching dialogue, in particular, it has provided theology with conceptual resources from which to clarify and nuance its own reflections. The relationship between philosophy and theology is of course by no means new and holds a prominent place within the academy. One could indeed cite multiple models: from Platonic, Aristotelian, Kantian/Phenomenological, Hegelian, Marxist/Critical, and so on. Systematic theology or fundamental theology has typically been the discipline wherein this relationship is most acutely exhibited, though not without ambiguity. In the last century the impact of continental philosophy has been fundamental for shaping the discipline. One thinks of the influence of existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics in Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, and Karl Rahner, as a response to both liberal and neo-orthodox theology, or for example, in more recent times the trans-valuational philosophy emanating from Hegelian and Marxist critiques informing liberation theologies. For our purposes, however, let us risk three broad demarcations which necessarily reduce the full complexity and underplay internal differences: first, a confusion and intermingling of disciplinary boundaries that proves generative and productive for theology, but which is considered by

12 The literature here is extensive, but for just one example see the recent topical issue of *Open Theology*: Nikolaas Deketelaere, Elizabeth Li, and Stephen DeLay (eds.) *Existential and Phenomenological Conceptions of the Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology* 5 no.1 (March 2019).

philosophy as a triumphalist theological gesture. Theology in this sense (while it would not always take ownership of this claim) is still seen as the queen of the sciences and philosophy its handmaiden. A version of this has been registered as criticism against several prominent thinkers of the theological turn as demonstrated recently by Christina Gschwandtner, in her provocatively titled *Postmodern Apologetics?* (2013). For Gschwandtner, thinkers like Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, Jean-Louis Chrétien, even Richard Kearney and John Caputo, while all claiming to do philosophy in some or other way, do so in defence of re-igniting Christianity or at least some version of it.[13] Secondly, one can cite an inverse Hegelian movement where philosophy is now accused of marking out the religious as but a moment in the realization of the Absolute in the philosophical Concept (*logic*). Here, while theology might provide interesting insights, it offers nothing for which philosophy cannot think itself, or if it does, philosophy's concepts are there to fulfil theology's imaginative presentations.[14] And thirdly, as a result, one can detect reactionary gestures whereby theology and philosophy both cease any overt discussion whatsoever and silo themselves out more fully in mutual exclusion – a more pernicious form of modernity's rationalist separation where these discourses supposedly operate on incommensurable levels. In between these demarcations (the handmaiden, Hegelian, and rationalist) reside numerous others of greater nuance and which fill in centuries of argument and debate.[15]

III

I shall return to the trajectory of the "theological turn" below but first the question should be asked: what has Paris to do with Athens? Or rather, the "Athens of the South"? – as Stellenbosch University has sometimes "mythologically" been known.[16] The latter is singled out not only for space

13 Christina Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

14 See Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827,* One Volume Edition, ed. Peter Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 425–426.

15 For more on the relationship between philosophy and theology, see Ingolf Dalferth's classic work, *Theology and Philosophy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, [1988] 2001).

16 N.J. Brummer et al. *Gedenkboek van het Victoria College* (Kaapstad: De Nationale Pers, 1918), quoted in Amanda Botha (ed.) *Chris Brink: Anatomy of a Transformer*

limitations[17] but because it localizes what Andrew Nash has called the "dialectic tradition" of philosophy in South Africa,[18] broadly coinciding with the influences of continental philosophy of religion described above and, as we shall see, is fundamental for the development of theology in Stellenbosch. For the argument here, the full scope of this tradition will not be of consequence. But it is worth noting at this stage that throughout its development, there was never a clear-cut distinction between philosophy and theology. Indeed, the philosophers of British idealism in the early 20th century, like Alfred Hoernlé, was himself the son of Lutheran missionaries, and the first philosophers appointed at Stellenbosch were also at the same time Dutch Reformed ministers, including N.J. Brümmer and Tobie Müller. It was very much a part of the official *modus operandi* for philosophers to also be ordained and for those students following the track to become ministers to study preparatory subjects in philosophy. Moreover, the study of philosophy as formal preparation for theology would officially continue at Stellenbosch well into the mid-80's. After this time, it was no longer considered necessary to study philosophy beyond the first-year philosophy subjects (though many of the stronger students continued to write their undergraduate theses, before moving over to theology) even though the Philosophy Department would retain official representation on the Faculty

(Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2007), 7.

17 One would also have to include the figures and movements in Pretoria for example, where similar influences were at play. See again, Pieter Duvenage, *Afrikaanse filosofie* (2016), as well as his, "Phenomenology in South Africa: An indirect encounter with Richard Kearney" in Daniël Veldsman and Yolande Steenkamp (eds.) *Debating Otherness with Richard Kearney: Perspectives from South Africa* (AOSIS, Cape Town, 2018), 61–85.

18 Andrew Nash, *The Dialectic Tradition in South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1999). Nash's book, first published as a doctoral thesis, is a monumental achievement and unfortunately has not received the kind of attention it deserves. Nevertheless, his aim is to situate between mid-19th century urban-English liberal capitalism, with its unencumbered desire for modern progress on the one hand, and a rural Afrikaans neo-Calvinist orthodoxy on the other, a so-called "dialectic tradition" that took its place in Stellenbosch with its roots in Dutch republicanism and theological liberalism. For Nash, this tradition is not dialectical in the Marxist sense, but represents the open-ended discussion (or the *oop gesprek* of N.P. van Wyk Louw, and later Johan Degenaar) of Socratic dialogue for the sake of the common good, as well as entails a Kierkegaardian delimitation of doctrinal objectivity in favor of an existential affirmation of life. In a similar vein, Vincent Brümmer called this tradition the "mystic tradition": see Vincent Brümmer, *Vroom of regsinnig? Teologie in die NG Kerk* (Wellington: Bybel-Media, 2013), 15. I will be drawing liberally from Nash's account in the following section.

Board of Theology right until the first decade of the 21st century.[19] Suffice to say that the picture emerges of theology's relationship to philosophy as one of constant intermingling and even confusion.

To begin to address the precise character of this relationship, we turn to three figures from the Stellenbosch tradition; the theologian Johannes du Plessis (1868–1935), controversially removed from the Faculty of Theology by the Cape Synod in 1932, the Chair of philosophy, J.F. (Freddie) Kirsten appointed in 1942, and finally one of Kirsten's exceptional students, Johan Degenaar (1926–2015), who remained influential right until the 1980s. The historical work will have to be cursory, but in treating each case it will be clarified how a propaedeutic relation takes shape and which is subsequently modified in response to the changing circumstances of the growing pressures of modernity in South Africa (political included). Given that the conservative power differential was clearly held by the "Kuratorium"[20] of the Dutch Reformed Church, any theological engagement with philosophy would predominantly occur in philosophy. It is, therefore, only until recently following these vast political changes that this conversation might finally be said to have returned to theology. At that point, we will have recourse to bring Athens back to Paris.

This will not be the place to review the saga of Professor Johannes du Plessis and the charges of heresy brought against him, except to say that his embrace of the principles of Enlightenment would set the stage for what can be called a "unity-in-difference" model of theology and philosophy. For du Plessis, "Reason paves the way for faith; [and] faith completes and perfects the work of reason."[21] Du Plessis's framework of philosophical optimism, inspired in part by the pragmatism of Tobie Müller but departing from it, held onto a metaphysical basis for the harmonious development of nature and human culture that accordingly would evolve gradually and evenly. This formula made logically coherent a commitment to reformed orthodox belief while

19 For these details, see Anton A. Van Niekerk, "A department under siege: How Philosophy at Stellenbosch was split in order to survive." *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 3 no. 1 (2017): 451–473.

20 The supervisory body that presided over the Stellenbosch seminary (or Kweekskool) which later became the Faculty of Theology. See, Ibid.

21 J. du Plessis, "Geloof en Rede." *Die Soeklig* 11 no. 5 (1933), 150. Quoted from Nash, *The Dialectic Tradition,* 77.

at the same time embracing the modern sciences. Faith and reason for him were, therefore, coupled by a relationship of complementarity: there are two epistemological truths (difference), namely, God's knowledge which is always Absolute and human knowledge, which is always contingent and an approximation of truth, but they are not separate and constitute a unity within the human person. Science and reason are to be embraced as an enabling condition for theology's development, not an obstacle to be avoided. By setting up this optimistic unity-in-difference model, du Plessis was able to embrace the distinctiveness of philosophy – and thus depart from a Kuyperian tradition which emphasized a Christian science – while also admitting its contingency on the Absolute, the knowledge of which is to be found in God alone.[22]

Despite his untimely departure, one can orientate the ethos of du Plessis's legacy by noting the exemplary articles like those of Nico Hofmeyr[23] and D.J. Malan,[24] in *Het Zoeklicht* (1923–1936), the liberally orientated church journal which du Plessis edited. Reflecting the philosophical and theological ideas as well as tensions that would be further expounded in the later 1940s and '50s, at its heart, *Het Zoeklicht* imbibed the spirit that tried to reconcile the advancement of modern reason with Christian faith; the foundation of which was the experience of the human person over doctrinal positions or tradition. With Du Plessis and *Het Zoeklicht* combined, an aura of scientific inquiry and intellectual ferment followed, winning the former a number of admirers. But it was his critical questioning of the Reformed hermeneutics

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22 Ibid. Nash goes on to note that du Plessis didn't ever fully work out the philosophical implications of these thoughts, but that they could be felt in the political and social realm. For example, the harmonious and optimistic view of human reality allows him to stress the contingency of our knowledge about "racial questions" in a fashion that refuses dogmatism or intolerance. However, ultimately, while such sentiments were to serve all classes of society, they only had traction with the bourgeoisie of the Afrikaans intelligentsia situated mostly in the Western Cape, significant because of their alliance with capitalism that was opposed by northern conservatives. Ibid, 78–79.

23 In a series of articles, titled, "'n Hedendaagse Sokrates in Ons Porseleinkas" in *Het Zoeklicht* between 1928–29, Nico Hofmeyr would emphasize proto-existentialist themes in the idea of the personality and ardent Socratic questioning. See Nash, *The Dialectic Tradition*, 82–83, 224fn48–53.

24 Similarly, Malan would pick up more intensely on Kierkegaardian themes of the primacy of the existing individual over doctrinal orthodoxy. See his "Is ons Christendom Christelik?" *Die Soeklig* 11 no. 5 (1933), in Nash, *The Dialectic Tradition*, 83, 224fn54.

of the time that would unleash radical consequences: not only was he acrimoniously removed but as a result theology would suffer an ossification that would push it back further into fundamentalist orthodoxy, leading to the unique situation that it was through *philosophy* that theology would continue to develop; i.e., philosophy as a desire to test knowledge on its own terms and, as such, to become both a source from which to challenge the Church but also to expand theology's horizons. If one were to venture a summary of the philosophical milieu of the 30s (bearing in mind the theological orthodoxy on the other hand) in Stellenbosch one could say that (1) it was characterized by an emphasis on the processual and organic development of history as opposed to the mechanic, (2) a tentativeness that accompanied all human knowledge, and finally (3) a renewed intensity on the whole "personality" of the individual and her experience.[25] In short, philosophy was edging toward epistemological notions that stressed contingency and doubt, while theology remained anchored to the ontological and epistemic certainty offered by the Christian gospel. Such was the context that met J.F. Kirsten, who essentially towed this philosophical and theological line simultaneously.

The second figure in this trajectory, the philosopher succeeding N.J. Brümmer and who sympathized with du Plessis as a student during the height of the '30s controversy, was J.F. (Freddie) Kirsten. Kirsten was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church after completing his theological training and a doctoral thesis in philosophy on the French philosopher Henri Bergson.[26] In 1942 he heeded the solicitation, as was custom, of his former teacher Brümmer, to succeed the position as the new chair of philosophy. Trained as a theologian and tasked with educating future ministers, but within a climate of theological orthodoxy, Kirsten played a mediating role that continued the critical philosophical inquiry promulgated in the wake of du Plessis while maintaining theological dogma. In his sophisticated account engaging Bergson, Kirsten defends this conservatism (in this case the idea of God's design) against the materialism of Darwinian evolution. However, instead of denouncing Bergson's idea of "creative evolution" with dogmatic

25 Nash, *The Dialectic Tradition*, 81–84.

26 J.F. Kirsten, *Die Doelbegrip by Bergson: 'n Filosofies-krities Ondersoek* (unpublished D.Phil Thesis, Stellenbosch, 1935).

theological claims, he invokes a philosophical approach that succeeds in accepting certain parts of it while rejecting others. Kirsten accepted on epistemological grounds the dynamism and multiplicity of human thought and understanding in Bergson's concept of human freedom, but rejected his indeterminism, since, according to him, this led to the kind of mechanistic movement that denies the freedom Bergson was defending. It is here that Kirsten then introduces his theological anthropology, by suggesting that in order to avoid the pessimism toward which Bergson's thought inevitably leads, one must affirm a belief in God "who executes his plan with infallible certainty". This, we can now call, Kirsten's "mediating" Christian philosophy; open to "[t]he epistemological flux in which we find ourselves [but which] is brought to rest in anthropological stasis"[27] – a philosophy in service of theology, dispensed as an epistemological engagement with questions arising from culture, but which finds its solution ontologically in Christian belief.

The outcome of this mediating position was that a generation of philosophy students could continue the project of intellectual inquiry. However, while this continuity – taken up by those who followed Kirsten from the late 40's and into the '50s and '60s, including Daantjie Oosthuizen, James Oglethorpe, and Johan Degenaar, through the European philosophical movements of existentialism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics – would generate a philosophical renewal, this would not be mirrored in the Faculty of Theology. Instead, the confessional line strongly influenced by Abraham Kuyper would be maintained by those like Koot Vorster and F.J.M Potgieter, both of which held senior leadership roles in the DRC. This era at the Faculty of Theology, Bernard Lategan has called the period of "Hermeneutical deficit", which brings us now to the third case, that of Johan Degenaar, Potgieter's philosophical or rather theological counterpart.[28]Following both du Plessis and Kirsten, Degenaar continues the philosophical inquiry that informs Christianity, challenging it but

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27 Nash, *The Dialectic Tradition*, 88.

28 See Bernard Lategan, "History, Historiography, and Reformed Hermeneutics at Stellenbosch: Dealing with a Hermeneutical Deficit and Its Consequences," in Wallace M. Alston Jr. and Michael Welker (eds.) *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity II: Biblical Interpretation in the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 157–171.

now also re-shaping it existentially and hermeneutically. And just like du Plessis, he would also be charged by the Kuratorium for his Socratic corruption of the youth.[29] The link to Socrates here is not incidental, since it is explicitly through Socrates and a lineage including St. Augustine, Luther, Pascal, and Kierkegaard, that Degenaar (and his contemporaries) would revolutionize philosophy at Stellenbosch. If in Kirsten's mediating Christian philosophy, the epistemological and anthropological were held separately, by accommodating the advances of reason and science on the one hand but shielding human existence in Reformed orthodoxy on the other, then the revolution undertaken by Degenaar and his colleagues was to remove the wedge and drive epistemology into ontology itself. In what could finally be called a *hermeneutic* of Christianity – the third iteration of the propaedeutic model – Degenaar emphasizes that it is not the objectivity of knowledge which is taken up by philosophical inquisition but rather the denunciation of objectivity which is the task of the philosopher. Degenaar writes, "Our problem is to consider which philosophers busied themselves only with the objective, and which threw themselves into life itself, in order to grasp the meaning of life itself. *The latter are the true philosophers*."[30]

Let us point out two elements which give this existential emphasis its Christian meaning. The first is that, unlike Kirsten for whom our epistemological flux could be grounded in the certainty of belief, for Degenaar, clearly emulating Kierkegaard, the existing individual has no certainty but must respond to the event of grace offered by God continually, deciding, only for it to be undone again and again, living as a Self within this discontinuity totally dependent on this event. Philosophical knowledge and theological certainty are both in the end idle pursuits, since Jesus as the knowledge of life itself cannot be grasped or possessed, and so, Degenaar can write, "*I must be actively* in the midst of life, otherwise the holy mystery of it will be lost and it will become an intellectual problem."[31] The philosophical hermeneutic offered to Christianity is one in which the Christian life is to be *lived*, not resolved upon through intellection or avoided in quietistic circumvention of the commitment and fidelity to the

29 See Van Niekerk, "A department under siege."

30 Quoted in Nash, *The Dialectic Tradition*, 95.

31 Ibid., 100. Emphasis added.

event of grace. Secondly and crucially, this hermeneutic strategically places the history of philosophy *within* the history of Protestant Christianity. As Degenaar's philosophical lineage suggests, all, except Socrates, can be considered as Christian thinkers. With this sleight of hand, as Andrew Nash again suggests, Stellenbosch existentialism presents "as the logical outcome of Protestant Christianity" and thus allows Degenaar to "avoid having to defend that existentialism as theological orthodoxy."[32] In a certain sense then, we can say that this philosophical hermeneutic has transformed Christianity from the inside,[33] making it appear as if it were always from the beginning a Christian philosophy. Thus, it becomes clear that by setting up this hermeneutic within the walls of theology, Degenaar was attempting to strategically place philosophy as an ally and not as a contestant for supremacy.[34]

Time does not permit to explore the intriguing history of the splitting of the department of philosophy into another department of political philosophy, and Degenaar's subsequent transferal there facilitated by Kirsten under the auspices of the Kuratorium in order to shield Degenaar's subversive impact on theology students. The later appointments of former students both returning from the Netherlands, including Hennie Rossouw in philosophy

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32 Ibid., 101.

33 An example of this is Degenaar's deployment of the phenomenological method on traditional Christian doctrine, for example, the "immortality of the Soul". In his *Die sterflikheid van die siel* (1963), as Anton van Niekerk writes, "The body, for Degenaar, is the total or complete human being. He writes in this regard: "Against the generally accepted belief I propose the model of the body as situation. This, however, leaves no space for a greater emphasis on one part of what it means to be a human being. It does acknowledge the significance of the idea of immortality, not because it literally suggests the fact of immortality, but because it [i.e. the claim to immortality] manifests something of man's attitude towards his body and towards death ... I therefore want to propose that, rather than an immortal soul, [the idea of] a broken body opens the way to deepened insight into the expression 'the image of God'". See Van Niekerk, "A department under siege," 457–458.

34 While things get somewhat more complicated in Degenaar's later work on *freedom as transcendence*, developed in response to the fixity or eternal nature of human beings – emphasized by neo-Calvinists or other classic liberal accounts – he was all the time attempting to reconcile a conception of philosophy that did not simply conform to theology, but at the same time did not displace it. His series of exchanges with E. A. Venter, who argued that all our presuppositions of the world are religious, and therefore all philosophical thought was religiously motivated, allowed Degenaar to clarify his phenomenological approach, from one that started out partial to a presuppositionlessness thought, to one where presuppositions are always contested.

(1963) and Andre du Toit in political philosophy (1969), ensured, however, that the tradition of continental thought in its phenomenological, hermeneutical, existential, and later Marxist and postmodernist modes was continued; "shaping the minds of the next generation of theologians and philosophers and imbuing them with a general and critical hermeneutical consciousness."[35] In terms of the kinds of philosophical questions that were being raised and their impact on theology, it seems that this kind of inquiry continued to be carried about by the philosophers, and that the situation at the Faculty of Theology remained fairly quiet.[36] Nevertheless, because of the propaedeutic relationship between philosophy and theology, whether implicit or not, the impact of Degenaar, Rossouw, and Bernard Lategan, would become influential as it nurtured this hermeneutical awareness among theologians that were especially critical of apartheid.

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35 Lategan, "History, Historiography, and Reformed Hermeneutics at Stellenbosch," 165. Rossouw's doctoral dissertation was influential in this regard. See his *Klaarheid en Interpretasie* (Amsterdam: Kampen, 1963) and then later, *Wetenskap, Interpretasie, Wyseid* (Port Elizabeth: University of Port Elizabeth, 1980).

36 Indeed, it is of course well-known that the generative period for theology in South Africa would gather steam in the 70s and 80s, in particular, through theologians returning from the Netherlands inspired by such figures as Gerrit Berkouwer and his influence on Reformed thinking in a line which mediated Bavinck and Barth – although in the 50s and 60s Barth's influence was already being felt, e.g., through the introduction of B.B. Keet on the young Beyers Naude. Yet, it is only with the generation which followed those including Jaap Durand and Willie Jonker, like Dirkie Smit, where the influence of philosophy in its broadly hermeneutical mode would have its influence in theology. An expanded understanding of rationality which included the existential and hermeneutical conditions of the human person (not just of text), and its larger ethical-social implications, would establish the intellectual foundations that undermined theological and philosophical legitimations of apartheid. (On this, see Ernst M. Conradie and Cornel W. du Toit, "Knowledge, Values, and Beliefs in the South African Context since 1994: An Overview." Zygon 50 no. 2 (June 2015), 462.) Dirkie Smit, for example, a prominent figure in the Stellenbosch theological tradition already in his earliest writings considered Jürgen Habermas' notion of dialogue, and later through the mediations of Hennie Rossouw and Bernard Lategan on the practical philosophical application of Gadamerian and Ricoeurian hermeneutics, would come to formulate the "contextuality" of his theology as "public", "dialogical", and "communal". See Dirkie Smit, Demokrasie en Dialoog (Stellenbosch: University, master's in philosophy, 1974). For the hermeneutic influence on Smit see, Leon Fouché, "Orientation and ambiguity – On the decisive hermeneutical dimension in Dirkie Smit's theological thinking." NGTT 54 no. 3–4 (2013): 147–156. Smit also edited a selection of essays honouring the work of the renowned Stellenbosch Biblical scholar, Bernard Lategan, who was influential in disseminating the hermeneutical debates to theological audiences; see Dirk J. Smit (ed.), *Hermeneutics and Social Transformation: A Selection from the Essays of Bernard Lategan* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2015).

IV

What does all this mean for the future of Systematic Theology and its relationship to philosophy in South Africa? For if this history demonstrates that we are not dealing with two impartial approaches that disclose reality in a benignly uncontested way, then at minimum the tentative path traced here through the Stellenbosch tradition suggests these disciplines were always in close proximity to each other. And if this proximity was at times openly conflictual, then, as I have suggested, it would also later develop into a propaedeutically modelled relationship. The latter culminating in a *hermeneutic* of Christianity, whereby the developments in philosophy that transpired in Stellenbosch would produce an understanding of Christianity that could establish the necessary conditions to reconcile the tensions of the Christian faith vis-à-vis the unavoidable encounter with secular impulses, liberalism, and scientism. There is no evidence, as far as this author is aware, that such a hermeneutic of Christianity ever became *hermeneutical theology* in Stellenbosch, at least in the strict and explicit sense.[37] Indeed, one of the ways to account for this situation is the changing direction that philosophy and theology would need to take so as to address the urgent political and social crisis facing the country. The philosophy department's growing concern with overtly ethical questions meant that an interest in continental philosophical approaches to religion and theology would recede into the background,[38] while at the same time,

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37 Schematically, Hermeneutic theology (capital H) might describe an in-between position, from, on the one hand, the liberal protestant tradition of Schleiermacher which begins from *human's understanding* of God, and on the other hand, a rather unrefined Barthianism that begins from *God's understanding* of his creatures. The Bultmanian tradition rather, is to understand God's revelation as a language-event (*Sprachereignis*), that neither conforms to a liberal mentalist option, nor surrenders the decisiveness of revelation at the cost of the provisionality of human experience. For a recent discussion which complicates these matters considerably, see Ingolf Dalferth, *Radical Theology: An Essay on Faith and Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016). However, while all theologies are hermeneutical insofar as they involve interpretation (of Scripture, tradition, creed, experience), one could, in a weaker sense, point to the work of David Tracy, whose explicit use of Gadamer and Ricoeur to define the interpretive task of systematic theology would become a crucial point of reference for South African "public" theologians (fn.47 below). See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination (London: SCM Press, 1981) and Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

38 Degenaar's vociferous criticisms of apartheid from the Chair of Political Philosophy coupled with the later establishment of the *Centre of Applied Ethics* in 1990 is indicative

theology would also have to find its own voice through a critical synthesis and recovery of Reformed and Black liberation theologies, deployed to address the political and humanitarian exigencies of the time.[39] Therefore, it seems safe to say that theology's relationship to philosophy as a discreet topic of investigation became overshadowed by the need to engage a context embedded within deep ideological struggle.[40]

But for reasons with which this article began, namely, the increasing secularization of the academy and society, as well as the postmodern and postcolonial critiques that have now followed the end of the formal apartheid era and directed at certain theological optimisms, it seems that the opportunity to interrogate this relationship might again not only be possible but also necessary. A comprehensive review cannot be accommodated here, but it is interesting to note that some South African theologians in the last decade have continued to borrow explicitly from thinkers within the continental turn for their theological purposes,[41]

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of this shift to ethical-public concerns.

39 See for example, John de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), and Allen Aubrey Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

40 Perhaps the closest contemporary South African systematic theology comes to reflecting on its philosophical presuppositions with respect to a secular discourse, can be found in the early discussions of public theology, since the latter must directly account for nature of this "public". See Dirkie Smit's, "Notions of the Public and Doing Theology." *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007), 431–454. In order to make theology reasonable to "the public" – to fulfil its aim of engaging with public issues and values – public theology needed to couple itself with an expanded concept of reason. This was innovatively provided by the work of David Tracy (see fn.44 above). However, the successful packaging of liberal Christianity under the universal umbrella of public theology, especially evidenced by the way in which it (controversially) subsumes other theologies (e.g., liberation, black, feminist), continues to implicitly re-instate the now defunct opposition between private-public and its modifier, religious-secular. See here Linell Cady, "Public Theology and the Postsecular Turn." *International Journal of Public Theology* 8 (2014): 292–312.

41 Though not South African himself, Jakub Urbaniak has been working in the country for many years. See his, "From Religionless Christianity to Immanent Grace: Bonhoeffer's Legacy in Badiou". *The Journal of Religion* 94 no. 4 (Oct 2014): 457–484; Robert Vosloo frequently invokes Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur on themes related to forgiveness, memory and democracy: Robert Vosloo, "Difficult Forgiveness? Engaging Paul Ricoeur on Public Forgiveness within the Context of Social Change in South Africa." *International Journal of Public Theology* 9 (2015): 360–378, and "'Democracy is Coming to the RSA': On Democracy, theology, and futural historicity" in Verbum et Ecclesia 37(1), a1523. The work of Johann-Albrecht Meylahn at the University of

and moreover, there have also in recent years been several theology and philosophy masters and doctoral degrees that have undertaken research that actively engages the "turn to religion".[42] It seems that this moment of philosophical and theological ferment – wherein both disciplines are actively drawing on each other more liberally for inspiration – is indicative of an epoch of theological and philosophical exploration that is more resistant to observing the strict disciplinary boundaries which ultimately ferment the destructive dialectical formations between the religious and the secular. Contextually, however, we are somewhat far removed from the historical sketch given above – i.e., there is no longer the theological fundamentalism from which philosophy had to shield itself, nor does the Christian framework function as guarantee for cultural homogenization – but one may nevertheless detect a parallel with the innovative spirit that animated the philosophical explorations of Degenaar and his contemporaries. Thus, are we seeing perhaps another variation of what Anton van Niekerk (following Vincent Brümmer), with reference to Degenaar's existential interpretation, describes as "a gradual return to the values of the mystic tradition"?[43] This question should remain open for now since much is yet to be seen as theology continues to take new shape in the twenty-first century. However, insofar as this "mystic" tradition issued in a philosophy that ultimately served a Christian vision of reality (albeit one inclusively conceived), it is worth pausing to reflect on the consequences of repeating this methodological tendency, for we now can no longer assume the privileged place of Christianity in our post-secular world.

Pretoria also makes liberal use of a range of "postmodern" thinkers, from Heidegger, Derrida, Badiou, Deleuze, Žižek, and more recently François Laruelle. See his *[Call] – Responding and the worlds in between: doing (non) philosophy in a time of democratic materialism* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2021).

42 See for example, Daniël Veldsman and Yolande Steenkamp (eds.) *Debating Otherness with Richard Kearney: Perspectives from South Africa* (AOSIS, Cape Town, 2018); Yolande Steenkamp, *Postmetaphysical God-talk and its implications for Christian Theology.* Doctoral Thesis (University of Pretoria, 2016); Calvin D. Ullrich, Sovereignty and Event: *The Political in John D. Caputo's Radical Theology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021); Helgard Pretorius, "Theology at the Limit?: an investigation of Richard Kearney's philosophical hermeneutics in search of a responsible theological hermeneutic." (Stellenbosch: MTh Thesis, 2015).

43 Van Niekerk, "A department under siege," 471.

To bring this discussion to a close, the sentiments expressed in this article would eagerly endorse the recent theological engagements with continental philosophy, where continental thinkers from Derrida, Kearney, Caputo, Žižek and others, are being used to both critique contemporary theology but also to invigorate and breathe new life into it. Yet, to take a further critical and constructive step, we should ask: is it perhaps the case, as noted in the first section of this article and investigated in the second, that such investigations may in their attempt to draw these thinkers together, end up confusing these disciplines by either colonizing philosophy or reducing theology's own claims to philosophical standpoints? This is not a matter of policing or delegitimizing this exchange, but rather of being aware that questions of methodology are not simply neutral, and if left without consideration may end up not only re-instating theology's logic of conversion but also, paradoxically, domesticating its own message.

Deferring an immediate answer to these questions, I shall finally conclude by risking a constructive proposal by way of a return journey across borders back to Paris, specifically to the *Insitut catholique* where we find its current Dean of Philosophy, Emmanuel Falque. Falque, a student of Jean-Luc Marion, and thus firmly within the tradition of phenomenology, is the doyen of the so-called third generation of the "theological turn" (alongside Claude Romano and Renaud Barbas). With his work now being fiercely translated into English,[44] Falque has provoked much debate especially in his recent *Trilogié méthodologique*, the last of which is his most succinct discourse on method entitled, Crossing the Rubicon (2016).[45] At the heart of Falque's extensive project is a methodological axiom of proportionality, "*the more we theologize, the better we philosophize*",[46] the inverse of which is also applied, "*the more we philosophize, the better we theologize*". Contained

44 For an initial taste, See Falque's triptych which he calls his *Tridiuum Philosophique: The Guide to Gethsemane: Anxiety, Suffering, Death* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019); The *Metamorphosis of Finitude: An Essay on Birth and Resurrection* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), and *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

45 Emmanuel Falque, Reuben Shank (trans.) *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016). The other two titles in the trilogy include the still yet untranslated, *Parcours d'embûches* (2016) and *The Loving Struggle: Phenomenological and Theological Debates* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018).

46 Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 25.

in both formulas is not a logic of supremacy nor of deliberate confusion but one of encounter, where the crossing of the Rubicon, Caesar's famous river, is not a precipitation for violence but a crossing of disciplinary borders that respects that such a difference exists, and that in the crossing and the encounter with the other, one does not set-up camp but returns to the other side transformed. Falque is therefore interested in a reciprocal movement: first, through his preferred method of phenomenology he seeks inspiration *for* theology and thus a transformation of theology, and second, what he calls the backlash of theology, where phenomenology realizes its limits and is therefore also transformed by this encounter. Unlike Marion and his generation, Falque is not interested in the obsession with overcoming onto-theology, but nor is he willing to accept that there is no distance between theology and philosophy, by arguing as Marion does, that God's phenomenality or revelation are strictly philosophical. Understood in this context, Falque's work offers rather, as Richard Kearney comments, a "conceptual hospitality to many different guests…welcoming a plurality of voices. Not reducing them to one."[47]

On the way to offering a methodological proposal for the future between philosophy and theology as it is deployed in the regions of systematic theology in South Africa, we shall very briefly demonstrate *how* Falque envisions this encounter. As a philosopher, Falque is not concerned with the preparation of theology by defending its legitimacy philosophically, instead he wants to see how philosophy can enable Christian thinkers to approach theological phenomena with new eyes, and at the same time, as a confessing Christian, he wants to lead philosophers into an encounter with theology. This implies an understanding of theology that moves away from faith as a pre-given deposit of content, *only* following which can philosophical thought proceed. In short, Falque is a good Heideggerian, in the sense that he observes that theology is an ontic science, but unlike say biology or physics, its content is faith, which is the *mode of being* in believing.[48] Theology is the conceptual inquiry into this existence which is disclosed in the event of Christianity. But what is crucial is that as a

47 Richard Kearney, "Forward" in Martin Koči and Jason Alvis (eds.) *Transforming the Theological Turn: Phenomenology with Emmanuel Falque* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020), x.

48 Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 83–84.

distinct positive mode of existence it benefits from (is not prepared by) philosophy's prior ontological analysis. This means that the axiom "the more we theologize, the better we philosophize", in response to worried philosophers, is not an attempt to reclaim philosophy from theology as its origin, but as Heidegger later pointed out, if it were not for this encounter with theology "I would never have arrived at the path of thinking."[49] Theology benefits from the ontological analysis, but phenomenology has also been transformed by its encounter with theology.[50]On the other side, if the axiom is reversed, that "the more we philosophize, the better we theologize", theologians will wonder whether this is not to subjugate their discipline to philosophy. While the mention of Heidegger above suggests the benefit that theology might derive from the ontological analysis, Falque's argument is more thought-provoking, and begins rather with Ricoeur's famous question: *D'ou parlez-vous?* This is an interesting point, and as intimated, Falque's Catholic identity makes sense in following the Heideggerian move that wants to emphasize that the positive content of theology is not necessarily Scripture-as-propositional but is rather the lived experience of faith. In what Falque calls his "Catholic hermeneutics", the center is not the "ark of the Word" but the "ark of flesh" – the lived facticity of the incarnated Christ.[51] This orientation suggests that the carnal aspect of being in the world (phenomenology) takes on a certain priority to the verbal interpretation of meaning (hermeneutics).[52] Thus, now in response

49 Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfüllingen: Gunther Neske, 1959), 59.

50 Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 47–48.

51 Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 48–49.

52 Ibid., 29–54. Of interest for South African systematic theologians who continue to draw from continental philosophy, is the fact that Falque develops his "Catholic hermeneutic" in part as a response to but also an extension of Ricoeur's "Protestant hermeneutic" and Emmanuel Levinas's "Jewish hermeneutic". When Falque treats these "masters" he, out of honour for their work, wants to "reconsider it from another vantage point" (ibid., 29), and thus first recognizes, for example, that "the syntagm of hermeneutical theology has become the vestibule through which one must necessarily pass." Ibid., 31. So when referring to "Catholic" he does not mean to universalize it or to impose its dogmatic character in a confessional struggle, but rather to simply indicate "its identity and specificity". Ibid., 46. What Falque wants to achieve, then, is a radicalization of hermeneutics beyond the primacy of the autonomy of text in the Ricoeurian sense which has dominated systematics, to that which he considers as antecedent, namely, the materiality of the body and the voice. With this emphasis on the body and the corporeal his thought moves to the phenomenology of the Eucharistic body of the incarnated Christ, and thus dovetails with some recent interests again in the field of systematic

to theologians who think Falque wants us to cede ground to philosophy, his point is not simply that theology benefits from philosophy, but more radical, that theology is about reading and re-reading the book of experience (not just the letter of Scripture).

This is about a methodological starting point for theology captured by Falque's statement that: "we have no other experience of God than the human's".[53] Beginning with what Falque calls the *l'homme tout court*,[54] philosophy offers theology what it already has in its grasp, "the weight of humanity"[55] in the crucifixion, as that radical experience of finitude common to all human beings, with theology then capable of receiving and converting this meaning by means of the Resurrection.[56] While Falque's work is predictably demanding in the French essayist style, and although it is also firmly embedded in debates which are dominated by European and Anglo-American voices, I want to nevertheless suggest that insofar as South African theologians exist in an intellectual environment that is not siloed from global changes – and wherein the history and future of theology as a discipline among others cannot simply resume as a master discourse – it is proposals such as Falque's which can provide much needed breaths of fresh air: allowing us to interact with other disciplines, being transformed in the encounter with them, while at the same time not relinquishing the unique and above-all, *redemptive* character of theology's contribution.

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theology. See Robert Vosloo, Sipho Mahokoto, Martinus Havenga (eds.) *Broken Bodies and Redemptive Tables: The Lords Supper and Its Theological, Historical and Socio-Political Dimensions* (Wellington: Bybel-Media, 2020), and especially Vosloo's essay "Handled by our hands" which draws on the recent work of Richard Kearney on "touch". It would be of interest to compare the "carnal hermeneutics" of Kearney and the "Catholic hermeneutic" of Falque. See Richard Kearney, "The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics" in Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor (eds.) *Carnal Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 15–56.

53 Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 122.

54 Falque, *The Guide to Gethsemane*, xviii.

55 Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 124.

56 Ibid.

V

In this article I have sought to situate the recent "turn to religion" in continental philosophy. After providing something of a historical trajectory of the relationship between philosophy and theology at Stellenbosch, I have drawn from the work of Emmanuel Falque as a thinker within this "turn" to start thinking anew about the future relations of these disciplines. While research in this ever-expanding field has supplied creative energies to both philosophical and theological reflections, it has also brought to the fore methodological issues about the integrity of each discipline, and particularly, questions of whether and to what extent borders can or should be drawn between them. These questions are not merely for academic indulgence but are consequential for how these disciplines operate in the context of the secular academy and come to influence the discourse of religion in public life. On the one hand, several thinkers appropriate philosophical movements to articulate wholly new "postmodern theologies", scandalizing the philosopher's methods and the theologian's sacred discourses. On the other hand, some philosophers are also prepared to take their philosophy into religious quarters to *defend* theology, again, not only frustrating the philosopher's method, but also signalling a triumphalist apology for Christian faith.

The aim of this article has not been to offer commentary or to pass judgement on these innovations, but rather to use the questions which motivate their projects as a foil for reflecting on the South African context. These questions provoked by modernity's critique of religion find their parallel, as I have shown, in the attempt to reconcile Christianity and philosophy in Stellenbosch. However, while we do not live under the conditions of French laïcité – and indeed, precisely *because* religion in South Africa still enjoys a certain buoyancy in the academy and public life – our concern now is with its Western cultural heritage and the newly posed question of decoloniality. Thus, my argument has been to show that philosophy has been used in a particular *hermeneutical* way (in Stellenbosch) to serve theological needs in a changing cultural and historical milieu. Now, more importantly, if we are to respond to the fact that theology can no longer assume its privilege, then we need to pursue new methodologies that neither isolate philosophical and theological discourse, nor be content with allowing the subsumption

of one by the other. Instead, as I have presented in a preliminary way with Emmanuel Falque, we should attempt to facilitate their mutual encounter without confusion or compromise.

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