

Editorial

We are proud to present the 11th annual edition of the *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* (STJ), consisting of 29 peer-reviewed articles in STJ 11/1 and 12 articles in STJ 11/2.

STJ 11/1 includes two special sections. The first of these sections presents, under the title “Bonhoeffer and Philosophy,” five articles that traces its origins to papers presented in January 2024 at the 14th International Bonhoeffer Studies Congress in Sydney, Australia. The conference theme, “Crisis and Hope: Reading Bonhoeffer for Today,” was inspired in part by Bonhoeffer’s words from his time in Barcelona: “We should have so much love for this contemporary world of ours, for our fellow human beings, that we should declare our solidarity with it in its crisis and hope.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English 10:326)

Bonhoeffer calls us to discern the signs of the times and respond with action. Yet his scholarship was never bound to a single perspective; he engaged deeply with diverse intellectual traditions. The essays in this section reflect that spirit, each exploring Bonhoeffer’s thought in dialogue with a particular modern philosopher or philosophical theme – modernity, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Schmitt, and voluntarism. These essays are by esteemed scholars from diverse regions. This diversity is also reflected in the contributors to this collection of essays. Paul S. Chung, originally from Korea, has taught for many years at Luther Seminary in Minnesota. Friedemann Barniske, a German professor, currently serves at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong. Matt Aroney, an Australian, is pursuing his studies at the University of Aberdeen, while Jason Lam, originally from Hong Kong, now teaches in Melbourne. Lastly, Christopher King is affiliated with several institutions across the United States. Together, this distinguished team from various continents contributes rich perspectives under the shared theme of modern philosophy and its key thinkers. These essays not only wrestle with themes central to Bonhoeffer’s era – church, ethics, and politics – but also engage with enduring questions about the role of faith in public life and the meaning of hope amid crisis. These essays affirm that studying Bonhoeffer is not merely an intellectual pursuit; rather, it offers a profound resource for articulating hope in a world that continues to face crises of many kinds.

The second special section, presented under the theme “Receiving Nicaea,” contains eight articles (by Vincent Mandla, Godfrey Baleng, Marnus Havenga & Robert Vosloo, Ignatius Ferreira, Graham Ward, Ernst Conradie, Daniël Louw, and Rian Venter respectively). These articles were first presented at a conference on the theme “Receiving Nicaea: On Creeds, Culture, and Christian Witness – 1700 years after a Council,” held at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, 19–21 May 2025. As the global church marked the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea (325 AD) in 2025, this conference provided space to reflect on how to receive, interpret, and engage with this pivotal gathering in Christian history – and the Creed that bears its name – today. The articles included here engaged with the conference theme in a creative way that invites continuing conversation on matters that lie at the heart of Christian theology and Christian witness.

The rest of the articles in *STJ* 11/1 focus on a wide variety of topics, with a good balance between authors from different generations. Without doubt, readers with an interest in the South African theological landscape will find these articles to be of great historical and theological value.

STJ 11/2 (the section of the Practical Theological Society of South Africa) consists of 12 articles exploring contemporary African Practical Theology. These articles address diverse topics such as Homiletics, Black Liberation Theology, Youth Ministry, Gender Justice, accreditation and formation in private theological institutions, neo-Pentecostal leadership, spiritual abuse, Pastoral Care, Digital Ecclesiology, Pentecostal sacramentality, Indigenous eco wisdom and Restorative Ecotheology. All these articles emphasise that (practical) theology must be rooted in lived experience and aimed at promoting relational, institutional and ecological renewal. The essay emphasises critical issues such as mental abuse, insufficient ministry training, ecological crises, ageing and mental health, and digital transformation in churches.

The authors of these articles argue that meaningful theological practice should be accountable, contextually grounded, culturally sensitive and ethically innovative. Tshenolo Madigele offers “Soulful Solutions”, an integrative model that combines culturally modified Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) with spirituality to support elderly people in sub-Saharan

Africa, especially after COVID. Mookgo Kgatle advocates competence-based, church-centred training paths for neo-Pentecostal pastors, based on Jesus' coaching and practice model. It supports leaders without formal training and counteracts unaccredited theological training. Vincent Fenga explores the "Papa" phenomenon in Zimbabwe and shows how spiritual paternity carries biblical, cultural, political and charismatic meaning. He warns about risks such as dependence and personality cults and calls for accountability in pastoral leadership. Nobuntu Penxa-Matholeni uses the Xhosa proverb, "Ungalichamel'iqolomba", to highlight indigenous eco-ethical wisdom and emphasises its role in restorative pastoral care and eco-Christianity. Rudy Denton connects ecological stewardship with social and economic justice, criticises colonial legacies and neoliberal capitalism, and advocates for restorative, reconciliation-based practices for a fair life. Mashudu Muthivi studies mental abuse in the African context and explores the psychological and theological dimensions of it, and promotes trauma-informed, culturally sensitive pastoral care with independent supervision. Siphoh Mahlangu discusses how digital mediation can facilitate healing and presence, claiming that technology can support serving but cannot replace the relational core of pastoral care. Abraham Mzondi investigates digital ecclesiology in township Pentecostal contexts with an emphasis on the digital divide and proposes hybrid strategies to help pastors and congregations adapt to technology. Garth Aziz reinterprets youth ministry as a hermeneutical task that integrates Scripture, tradition and lived experience, with a focus on relational formation and contextual theology with youth. Martin Laubscher reflects on Allan Boesak's homiletics and highlights the importance of prophetic, context-conscious preaching for a decolonial future and public testimony. Ntseno and Dames introduce models to improve quality and accreditation in private theological institutions, while preserving African contextuality and transformative formation. Marilyn Naidoo critiques gender bias in seminary training and promotes feminist and female pedagogies, policy reforms and institutional support to promote fair and inclusive theological education.

A unifying theme that runs through all these articles is that (practical) theology focuses on relational recovery, restoring relationships among people, institutions, communities, and the environment through practices that are context-conscious, accountable, and ethically creative.

We hope that this rich harvest of academic contributions comprising *STJ 11* will stimulate further theological conversation and academic research.

Robert Vosloo

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