

God after Darwin: The promise of Trinitarian Theology²

ABSTRACT

Theology still needs to come to terms with the implications of the Darwinian revolution. Navigating between the extremes of creationism and naturalism, theology is challenged to articulate a course that recognises both the advances of science and the convictions of theology. This paper investigates specifically which notions of transcendence could do justice to both these sensibilities. It highlights the inadequacies of classical theism. As a number of theologians value a constructive dialogue between faith and science, this paper explores the possibilities of a thorough trinitarian approach to God in order to meet the challenges of a post-Darwinian era. Central to the argument is the revisioning of divine agency - which may represent science's greatest challenge to theology - along trinitarian lines.

This year's Darwin celebration is a reminder that faith in God should always be open to critical reflection. This may present theology with an occasion to account again for its construal of God after Darwin completed the Copernican revolution (Ayala 2007:7), and rendered traditional faith in God problematic. This raises the unavoidable question: How should one think about God in an intellectual horizon where all natural processes, inanimate and living, have become subjected to scientific explanation. An opportunity is offered to raise the question of the faith-science relation and, in particular, of the interplay between the identity of the Christian God and an evolutionary world view.

The history of theology's reception of Darwin is littered with questionable responses. The time may have dawned to take note of the biological sciences' wide acceptance of Darwin's key insights and to assume these as permanent conditions for doing theology. Consequently the God-question becomes crucial to the theological task, and the opportunity for seeking consonance between faith and science. Classical theism has clearly failed to establish this; it has often been the direct cause for the rejection of faith and the conflict with science. The *basic claim* of this paper is that a *consistent trinitarian revisioning of God reveals the possibility for a meaningful dialogue* between faith and evolutionary science. God's relationship to the world and divine agency are played differently in a trinitarian key, and space is created for a potential constructive conversation.

The *aim* of this paper is not to accommodate the identity of the biblical God to a Darwinian world view. The exploration of a theological tradition in light of a specific challenge may result in new configurations. Conversations seldom leave one unaffected. The encounter with Darwinism may allow theology to perceive the potential resources of its tradition more clearly, and to journey deeper into the mystery of God. A trinitarian rendering of God holds promise for an integrated ontology articulated by science and theology. The argument in the paper is developed in four moves: a theological position is taken *vis-à-vis* evolution; reference is made to relevant

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research by theologians on this issue; against the background of recent interest in Trinitarian Theology themes are identified in an analytic section which could form the groundwork for a view of God in an evolutionary era. The fourth and final synthetic section offers a proposal for such a construal of God.

1. EVOLUTION: VALIDITY AND DISCURSIVE SPACE

Schloss' (2008:99) statement adequately captures what is at stake in the current discussion on evolution:

While the evolutionary history of life is virtually undisputed among modern biologists, various causal explanations and metaphysical interpretations of this process are not infrequently antagonistic.

The scientific community confronts theology with the wide *acceptance of the validity* of Darwinism. Further refinements of the theory by the incorporation of Mendel's work on genetics and the discovery by Watson and Crick of the double helix structure of DNA have further strengthened its explanatory potential. The development of molecular biology, in particular, provides the strongest evidence of biological evolution and makes it possible to reconstruct evolutionary history "with as much detail and precision as anyone might want" (Ayala 2009:149). The traditional rebuttals based on supposed "missing links" have lost their persuasive power (see Ayala 2007:8 & Deane-Drummond 2009:9). Theology should come to terms with the Modern Synthesis and Neo-Darwinism as a reliable scientific paradigm.

There is consensus regarding the *basic and central tenets* of (Neo-)Darwinism. According to Ayala (2007:45), Darwin in *The Origin* focused on the explanation of design. Evolution is a two-step process: hereditary variation arises at random by mutation, and natural selection takes place when useful variants increase in frequency. The design, diversity and evolution of organisms are the result of the mechanisms of both chance (genetic mutation) and necessity (natural selection) (Ayala 2007:53, 76f). At stake are the three basic principles of agency, efficacy and scope in which Darwin's key idea of natural selection takes central stage to account for all evolutionary processes (Deane-Drummond 2009:3f). Uniquely Neo-Darwinian "doctrines" are the reduction of macro-evolution to micro-evolution, restriction of mechanisms of change to random variation and natural selection, acceptance of struggle as a driving force in nature, reductionist focus on the gene as unit of variation and selective transmission, and the lack of any directivity, progressiveness or teleology (Griffin 2008:277, Schloss 2006:190 & 2008:101ff).

The *implications for religion* of this explanation of evolutionary processes without recourse to any supernatural metaphysics have been clearly recognised. God, Scripture, meaning, morality, altruism, purpose and evil have all been rendered profoundly problematic (Griffin 2008:280ff; Schloss 2006:188 & 2008:107ff, Livingstone 2009:362ff). According to Schloss (2008:111), Darwinism did more than complete the Copernican programme of materialist causal explanation as asserted by Ayala (see e.g. 2007:42); it has effectively *rendered only those questions legitimate which can be addressed in a materialist framework*. Each one of these implications may require a separate theological response. This paper focuses on the question of God while the other concerns are addressed by implication.

Against this background the question arises of a *discursive space* for theology to make any contribution. This is not a quest for a strategy to seize upon lacunae in scientific explanation to insert God as the missing explanatory term (Tracy 2006:608). The overlap between a *scientific paradigm* and *comprehensive metaphysics* is easily and most often obscured in Neo-Darwinism. To insist on the distinction between the two is imperative for theology to take part in any dialogue

with science. Evolution as scientific paradigm is not without divergent internal debates. In a recent article Clayton (2008:301ff) identified no less than twelve interpretations of evolution. Important for the focus of this paper is his assertion that each position makes claims about what ultimately or really exists; this amounts to a metaphysical position. When interpretation of scientific work results in an exclusive and totalising metaphysical conviction, it becomes problematic. Ruse (2009:45) is probably correct to view contemporary debate on evolution as more than merely a conflict of science versus religion but as one between competing ideologies. Theology finds its task in the space between working paradigm and articulated metaphysics. Schloss (2006:189f) refers to “an epistemically ascending scale of theological significant propositions in evolutionary theory”: observational data are recorded; a naturalistic explanation is offered; a specific reductionist kind of naturalism is advanced by Neo-Darwinism, and finally an exclusivist epistemology is developed which disqualifies questions of ultimacy. It is exactly between moves two and three that theology acquires a space, albeit a space of resistance; a space to raise the question of God in a legitimate way.

Recently an additional space for theology has opened with the interest in ideas of *emergence* and *complexity*. Cobb (2008:8) considers this the most significant recent development in the discourse. The key issue is whether higher levels of complexity are independent of lower levels, and whether all causal power resides at the lower level. For Ellis (2006:756f) the answer is a definite no, and he refers to the “causal incompleteness of physics”. Gregersen (2006:781) proposes that concepts of complexity and emergence may be used to map an understanding of divine action. As such, space has been cleared for a rebuttal of simplistic and reductionist views of reality. Clayton (2005:345) even suggests that the faith-science dialogue is currently taking place in a “post-reductionist paradigm”. For a fuller and adequate metaphysics the issues of meaning and truth, as well as ethics and aesthetics cannot be ruled out.

2. THEOLOGICAL VOICES ON EVOLUTION AND GOD

In contemporary scholarship a clear trend is discernible among theologians who acknowledge the contribution of Neo-Darwinist evolution and insist on the continued significance of the Christian faith. Scholars such as Clayton, Edwards, Haught, Peacocke, and Polkinghorne should be mentioned. One of these theologians will be briefly discussed and a number of common trends will be highlighted.

The work of *Haught* is of particular significance. He views his project as “a theology of evolution” which should understand religious views in light of new scientific development (2003:302f). The task of theology is to reflect on evolution in light of “its own revolutionary understanding of God” (2005:15). Evolution will not only influence our understanding of God, but may even enrich theological conceptions of God (2003:304). The main issue for him is how to reconcile evolution with the idea of divine providence (2005:5). The starting-point is the revelatory image of God in Christ; and the question is whether this idea of God can illuminate the story of life without contradicting scientific evolution (2006:698). Two specific features of the image of God in Christ are crucial to Haught (2005:15ff; 2006:703): kenosis and promise. The belief in a self-emptying God is the radical unique message of the Christian faith and it allows theology to find a ground for creation and to assert autonomy for it. Creation is rooted in the very being of God, and it receives a freedom to make itself. Divine creativity is a “humble ‘letting be’ of the world” (2006:704). Understood as the “power of the future” (2008:96ff), God allows the world its character of temporal becoming and its inherent openness. In this instance, Haught locates the ultimate metaphysical explanation of evolution (2008:97). He is convinced that the two motifs of kenosis and promise address the three fundamental elements of evolution: chance,

lawfulness and deep time (2006:704ff).

A number of common themes recur in the work of the scholars mentioned to address the two major issues: God's relationship to the world and divine agency:

Panentheism is increasingly appreciated as a viable alternative to classical theism because of the proposed intimate relationship between God and the world. The latter is imagined as within God, while God still maintains some transcendence. The apt metaphor of the world as God's body is widely used (see Clayton 2003 for an excellent discussion).

Divine agency is expressly viewed as *non-interventionist*. Russell's suggestion (2007:202f) of NIODA – non-interventionist objective divine action – is typical of this sentiment.

Linked to this is an understanding of the act of creation as *kenotic* – a self-limitation by the divine – to allow free space for self-realisation (see e.g. Edwards 1999:36ff). This implies that the autonomy of creation is respected, and that the divine becomes vulnerable and in a sense "dependent" on creation. At the same time the problem of evil is tentatively addressed because it is part of the natural process of becoming.

Those with an antenna about creation's tendency towards greater complexity emphasise *futurity* as defining of God's nature (see Clayton 2004:27). The notion of divine becoming found in Peacocke's work is not widely shared.

A deliberate and consistently revisioned understanding of God as triune would resonate with some of these insights. Whether the serious work by the theologians mentioned is in all instances trinitarian or adequately trinitarian could be examined. For example, only Edwards's work on evolution is explicitly trinitarian; Clayton gives some indications of a process trinitarianism; Haught's work does not convey an explicit trinitarian orientation, although the logic of his construals is typically trinitarian. Polkinghorne has developed a trinitarian theology of nature which deals with some evolutionary themes (see 2004:60-87). Peacocke, who interacted in a sustained manner over a long career with evolution and raised important perspectives about God and evolution, is not a trinitarian theologian (see Schaab 2008 for an excellent overview of his oeuvre). My proposal would pursue some of the suggestions, but try to explore a more consistent trinitarian perspective on God and evolution.

3. TOWARDS A TRINITARIAN REVISIONING OF GOD

3.1 Rediscovery of trinitarian theology

Advocating a trinitarian approach to thinking about God is an attempt both at distancing oneself from classical and generic theism with its weaknesses and at retrieving a distinct Christian way of speaking about God. There is general agreement on the apparent problems associated with *traditional theism*: its interventionist nature; its immutability which prohibits the divine from any real involvement with the world, and its conception of monarchical power. The so-called Renaissance of trinitarian theology should be considered one of the major achievements of 20th-century theology (Grenz 2004:6)³.

The confession about God who is one, but whose life is differentiated as communal – Father, Son, and Spirit – is a statement of the very *identity* of the Christian God. It also radically questions conventional, generic and philosophically informed notions of God. It is a statement of faith which destabilises efforts to exhaust God's mystery with reference to singular categories such as causation.

A particular interest of the trinitarian renewal has been the insistence on the connection between God's inner life and the *economy of salvation* (see e.g. Sanders 2007). The latter is the

3 Good overviews are available of the state of scholarship. See e.g. Grenz 2004 and Kärkkäinen 2007.

basis and criterion of all knowledge of God. Epistemic priority is given to the economic trinity, and ontic priority to the immanent (:43). How God is met in the Jesus event and in Pentecost is how God is in God self.

A greater appreciation of the Eastern trinitarian logic, with its emphasis on the primacy of *personhood* and *relationality vis-à-vis* the Western concentration on substantial unity, has become an outstanding feature of contemporary reflection. This allows for thinking about God in terms of communion, mutuality and reciprocity.

A fascinating development has been the application of the trinitarian confession to urgent social problems and issues. For example, in the Moltmann Festschrift (Volf 2006) the trinity is connected with dilemmas concerning political economy, gender, inter-religious dialogue and justice. References to God are employed rhetorically in theological discourse in a more nuanced and expanded manner (see Venter 2009). This exploration allows for an interdisciplinary approach to the question of God. Simultaneously faith is related to a public horizon that is a most fruitful trajectory for traditional theology.

3.2 Glimpses of a trinitarian grammar

Dialogue requires silences, expressions, articulations and emphases. At stake is the question as to what specific construal of God, obviously in continuity with the Christian tradition, would allow meaningful and constructive conversation with Darwinism. This paper proposes that a consistent trinitarian rendering of God holds promise for this. This section would suggest features that could allow for such a trinitarian profile. Only a brief selection will be offered from the choir of voices in the Old and New Testament and the history of Christian theology. Obviously an integrated profile is not developed; only perspectives are offered concerning resources which may ultimately be employed.

a. It is crucial to clarify what the trinitarian confession really conveys. It is a brief way to express the biography of God's life in relation to His creation; it is a statement about the *drama of involvement* with the world. To state that the Christian God is one and differentiated as Father, Son and Spirit is to move into the orbit of narrative identity. To speak about a trinitarian God is to tell a story of *love*. Trinity is the drama of a "God for Us" (see the title of LaCugna's 1973 work). To say "God" as Christians is not to refer primarily to a principle of ultimate causation; something different, something more comprehensive is at stake.

b. Christian theology has always insisted on congruence of identity: the face of God in this historical drama is the eternal identity of God. Taking an economic starting-point, patristic scholars identified eternal "processions" in God. This states something profound: *fecundity*, *ex-stasis*, *excess*, *saturation* as the very life of God.

c. Coupled with the previous imaginative move, the positing of differentiated personhood at the very being of God, something equally profound has crystallised: *otherness* and *relationality*. Ultimacy is not monistic but communal. The term *perichoresis* describes the unique quality of God's relationality, e.g. unity and diversity (see Harrison 1991). The implications of this have been explored only in the late twentieth century. Apart from the unsettling consequences for perceiving divinity as such, the potential for approaching a doctrine of creation is obvious. Only such a God — fecund, relational, other-tolerating — could place another reality over against God self, and could address the question as to why there is something and not sheer nothingness. This God is the possibility of a creation. Jenson (1997:226) rightly refers to a "roomy" God. God has space in his very being (see Venter 2006), and the act of creation was nothing but space-making for the other.

d. The character and nature of the intra-divine relations allow the introduction of the notions

of *love, generosity, hospitality, gifting, beauty, and justice* (see Wolterstorff 2006, in particular) to be associated with God's eternal being. A trinitarian revisioning of the doctrine of God also questions the traditional attribute treatment (see Gunton 2002). A triune God surprises creation with unconventional perfections. This is the specific Christian contribution to the genealogy of God.

e. The Old Testament testimonies to YHWH are rich and pluriform (see e.g. Gordon 2007). A Christian testimony in an evolutionary era will probably need to highlight the traditions stressing *origin, promise, hiddenness*, and the daring counter-traditions which bravely face the "*dark side*" of God (e.g. Blumenthal 1993). The God of the Old Testament is the God of nature, the God who journeys with His people into the future, but who can never be domesticated according to social conventions.

f. The tentative intimations of an excess to the life of the exclusivist deity in the Old Testament became pronounced in the New Testament era in the *life of Jesus*. In traditional Dogmatics processions and missions are closely related. The Christian interpretation of the life of Jesus of Nazareth in terms of *incarnation*, and the events of the *cross* and *resurrection* open productive avenues for a creative encounter with a new world view.

f.1. Incarnation signifies a drastic datum about the Christian God: the freedom and embrace of otherness. In a most intimate manner this God identifies with material contingency, vicissitude and time. Christian tradition has correctly interpreted the incarnation in terms of *kenosis*, a self-emptying of the divine.

f.2. The event of the cross radicalises this line of interpretation: pain, suffering and death become an intra-divine possibility. Notions of paradox⁴ and hiddenness simultaneously surface again as modes of God's relationship to the world. Generic ascriptions of immutability, omnipotence, and aseity to the divine are fundamentally redefined.

f.3. The resurrection acquires fascinating texture in the faith-science dialogue. The typical question of historicity is replaced by a more fruitful one: the cosmic significance of the event (see Russell 2007:204). A cosmic *novum* is encountered in the resurrection. This calls for another heuristic framework, perhaps complexity and emergence theory⁵.

g. The role of the *Holy Spirit* has not only been neglected in theology, but has also not received the intellectual exploration it deserves in the faith-evolution debate. A full Christian response to evolution could be a pneumatological one due to the rich resources offered by biblical traditions with regard to the work of the Spirit. The kaleidoscopic nature of biblical voices testifies to the Spirit as the *presence* of God, the One who generates *life*, and gives *particularity* (Gunton 1993:180ff). Radical *transformation* is ascribed to the Spirit. Time and again the Spirit is the source of *surprising* occurrences. The Spirit in Pauline terminology is the foretaste, the deposit of the *future*; as eschatological gift the Spirit proleptically represents God's future for the world. Biblical traditions of the Spirit's work leave an impression of an inexhaustible reality, an energy, a divine dynamism which can never be fathomed. Van de Beek (1987:210ff) also refers to a *dark side* of the Spirit's work, which is mostly ignored in theology, when he speaks of "de

4 In a different context Ward (2003:65) briefly refers to the "irony at the heart of the trinity". The question arises whether the entire event of incarnation and death on the cross cannot be interpreted with the category of irony and whether this – when fully developed – could not lead to an ontology of the ironic, which would perennially destabilize reductionistic interpretations of material development.

5 These few suggestions about a Christological contribution to a trinitarian revisioning of God do not exhaust the interpretative possibilities. A rather large field of study – the place of Jesus in evolutionary history as such – is omitted. The work of, for example, De Chardin, Rahner, Moltmann, Deane-Drummond, and Shults deserve careful attention for a more detailed Christian position in the faith-evolution debate.

chaotiserende Geest". Recent pneumatological work is aware of the cosmic scope of the Spirit's work, but remains optimistic. Van de Beek (1987:213) cautions against this: "Als we de natuur en de geschiedenis als werking van de Geest beschouwen, hebben rampen, oorlogen, dood, en ziekte óók met de Geest te maken".

3.3 Profiling a trinitarian God for an evolutionary era

These trinitarian motifs should form the outline of a relative coherent profile of God which would allow interaction with Neo-Darwinism where issues of causation, chance and necessity, purpose and design, waste and evil, and ultimate explanation dominate the conversation. A reconceptualised notion of God is required which would simultaneously resonate with the sensibilities of evolution, and which would confront reductionist metaphysics with inadequate explanatory powers in light of emerging complex systems. The following features of the profile are proposed:

Inexhaustible mystery

The operative God-image under attack by atheistic Neo-Darwinians is a caricature of the God Christians worship and theologians account for rhetorically. To counter this, a trinitarian "baptism" of God (Jenson) strongly resists typical onto-theological approaches of the God question; God is not a mere higher being, who can be domesticated. The trinitarian God is in a strong sense transcendent: God can never be captured in human metaphors and denominators. Linguistic representations of "God" can never exhaust what is referred to. However, mystery is not so perplexing that it renders all speech meaningless. Trinitarian mystery critiques, destabilises and expands conventional notions of transcendence. At the same time the function God plays is beyond final articulation; all endeavours about naming are mere approximations. For example, this invalidates the argument that belief in God has become superfluous in light of the adequacy of Darwinian natural explanation. As horizon of ontological possibility the relevance of God cannot be reduced to *causation*. In a dialogue with Neo-Darwinism this may potentially hold promise for an alternative encounter.

Perichoretic relationality

This very God is not interventionistically involved with reality, but radically related to and present in the entire process of evolution in a unique way - perichoretically. This has a number of implications. To be perichoretically related implies simultaneously presence and distance; it allows for *freedom, contingency, unity-in-diversity* and *reciprocity*.

Space is granted to creation for self-becoming. Creation as space-making and as kenosis belongs to the texture of trinitarian theology. The claim of *randomness* by evolutionists is in a trinitarian manner interpreted as space for freedom, the gift to creation of autonomy. Perichoresis resists absorption; it maintains identity and otherness.

Secondly, this implies that creation is creation because of the very relationship; without the relationship there is no possibility of indeterminacy. What is interpreted as *necessity* in evolution becomes faithfulness in a trinitarian view. Nature evolves because of the very enabling presence of God to creation; because of God's faithfulness nature displays amidst "chance" a certain "lawfulness". Constancy is the gift of God's faithfulness.

The *unity* and *diversity* in the world is embedded in the notion of perichoresis. Mutual interpenetration is possible only in God's life; in a secondary sense reality echoes the same quality: a fundamental unity while maintaining an increased diversity.

Perichoresis heightens the sense of intimacy and mutuality: God is not only the ground of possibility for the existence of life, but also *affected* by this relationship. This allows for

interpretations that God is a fellow-sufferer with creation. God journeys with creation, enabling creation in faithfulness and allowing freedom for self-making. The traditional interventionist and even monarchical notion of God's agency and relationship to the world is replaced by this understanding.

A trinitarian approach need not be panentheistic; to understand God's relationship perichoretically allows for adequate emphasis on God's immanence. If this relationship is further developed in terms of Christology and pneumatology the need for panentheistic revision diminishes.

Paradoxical hiddenness

The presence of the triune God is not unequivocally discernible as this would have contradicted the very nature of his "being" and the nature of the relationship to the world. The cross offers a normative paradigm: in the seemingly absence, God is present. This expresses a deeper dimension of trinitarian theology: *kenosis*. Otherness, and becoming the other as is evidenced in the incarnation, is characteristic of the hiddenness of God. Without this paradox God's work in the universe cannot be appreciated. The irony of design amidst apparent waste and evil can never be sufficiently entangled by the human mind. That evolution has immensely problematised biblical motifs, for example God's care for the weak, should be seriously faced. *Waste*, suffering and evil in a post-Darwin world require committed and creative theological attention. The intriguing thesis by Jenson (2000) is worth considering in this instance. According to him, the locus of God's hiddenness is the very substance of all trinitarian teaching; it is not a matter concerning human epistemic weakness or God's ontological uniqueness, but concerning God's "reality as a moral agent" (:9). He continues to argue that, in light of God's fatherhood, theodicy becomes finally impossible (:9). To account in an intellectually satisfying manner for the fundamental problem of waste and suffering is an outstanding trinitarian task. To consider biblical motifs such as the so-called "dark side" of God, the event of the cross, the mystery and hiddenness of God may chart the way for the discourse; a discourse which will inevitably be forced to employ rhetorical forms of speech like paradox and irony.

Excessive creativity

The kenotic and perichoretic relationship with the triune God is always productive and generative. The apparent absent God continues to create from the very excess of His own divine fecundity. The Spirit as love accompanies creation to ever new forms of life. Love generates an excess; it is more than mere causation. This is the particular contribution of trinitarian theology. If God is love in God's very being, God is overflowing generosity. In God's relationship to the world the same is at play: love is the fountain of gifting. This is more than intervention, more than determination. Love is the occasion for complexity, emergence, novelty, meaning, beauty and justice. Trinitarian love offers a substantial alternative to evolution's mechanisms and forces for *change* and cosmic movement.

Dynamic futurity

The forward movement springs from the desire for love, for greater, more intimate communion and relationship. God's desire for reality, for mutual love is the eternal source of life's energy. The telos will never be stasis or increased adaptation, but ever-deepening life of participation in the divine life. A trinitarian theology envisions theosis as the orientation to life's movement. This desire for expansive communion opens the possibility for discussions of temporality and redemption. A trinitarian account of life is a narrative account, a dramatic story of love which requires time in the journey towards deepened communion.

4. CONCLUSION: INTIMATIONS OF A TRINITARIAN PROMISE

Approaching a trinitarian construal of God along these lines may offer the *promise* of fruitful apologetical, theological and ontological conversations.

Such a profile offers a *minimal consonance* with the questions at stake in an evolutionary horizon. Consonance does not imply commensurability; in fact, drastic divergent interpretations of reality emerge, but the possibility of conversation is not precluded from the onset. For too long a relationship of conflict has reigned in the evolution-Christian faith dialogue, with few constructive results. A so-called two-language approach, which has become synonymous with the name of Gould and which was recently advanced by Ayala, is escapist because of the independence it suggests. Only dialogue and ultimate integration are intellectually responsible approaches. Various domains of knowledge should finally be consistent (Clayton 2005:354) and contribute “to a coherent world view elaborated in comprehensive metaphysics” (Barbour 2003:765). Creegan (2007:504) may be correct when she claims that “Human societies live uneasily if stories of origin are fragmented and unrelated”. A debate receptive for mutual enrichment serves the common good.

Secondly, evolution could be considered a gift to theology (Haught 2003:301f) because it encourages an exploration of the Christian traditions of the divine mystery. The dialogue with science and the challenge of a new world view elicit a more nuanced and richer discursive articulation of God, which may ultimately be closer to biblical testimonies than classical philosophical theism. The interaction with science could be enriching for Christian *self-understanding*.

Finally, reflection on God for an evolutionary era accepts the challenge of theology’s public task of contributing to a comprehensive ontology. As such theology participates in developing intellectual spaces, thus serving common well-being. The ambitious aim for theology would be nothing less than suggesting the viability of a *trinitarian ontology*. Polkinghorne’s (2004:61) provocative remark - “a deeply intellectually satisfying candidate for the title of a true ‘Theory of Everything’ is in fact provided by Trinitarian theology” – serves this theological intention.

The proposal for a consistently re-envisioned understanding of God with trinitarian resources in no way implies the disappearance of difference. Ultimately the *conflict of interpretation* will not be one between atheism and theism, or between Christian faith and evolution, but one between *ontologies of reduction* and *excess*. The interaction of environment, natural selection and genetic mutation should not be interpreted as meaningless change, but as the journeying of a triune God with creation.

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KEY WORDS

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TREFWOORDE

Neo-Darwinisme
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