

An alternative moral ontology in a pluralistic, post-apartheid society

ABSTRACT

This article is a reading of the work of the well-known Reformed theologian, Dirkie Smit, to help Reformed churches in South Africa to reorientate them in a new, complex and pluralistic social environment. After considering the conceptualisation of pluralism in recent academic and theological debates, I examine Smit's reading of the impact of pluralism on Reformed churches in South Africa after apartheid and why these churches, in his opinion, no longer play a meaningful role in the present reconstruction of South African society. In the latter part of the article Smit's understanding of the liturgy as an "alternative moral ontology," creating alternative moral communities and identities, will be used to illuminate the future public role of churches in our complex, pluralistic society.

1. WHAT IS PLURALISM?

There can be little doubt that South-African society – with its different cultures, languages and religious groups – is in deep need of cultivating a culture of pluralism. But what do we actually mean when we use this term to describe the texture of a future society? Most people use the term in a popular and uncritical way to convey an endless proliferation of individual and group perspectives and forms of life. Some people even admire this "plurality," especially if they are suffering from obvious or latent forms of tyranny. In these circles pluralism naively means the freedom to express yourself and the freedom to choose the lifestyle that you feel comfortable with. Others are afraid of such plurality and rightly regard it as chaotic and as the breeding ground of relativism.

This article is an attempt to read the more recent work of the South African Reformed theologian Dirkie Smit to see how he defines pluralism in the dialogue within a broader academic debate and how he reads the changing position of Reformed churches in post-apartheid South Africa as a result of the pluralisation of the public sphere. In the last part of the article I consider theological decisions, guidelines, findings, and clues in his work to help churches to orientate themselves in a radical new public sphere. It will become clear that Smit's sense of direction for the church after apartheid is deeply rooted in his understanding of the church as having a unique identity grounded in his understanding of the gospel as an alternative moral ontology.

For Dirkie Smit a "pluralistic society" is not just a descriptive term to describe in a vague way any situation of diversity, pluriformity or plurality. A pluralistic society is not mere plurality and diversity. In line with thinkers like Habermas, Tracy, Huber and Welker, Smit uses the term "pluralistic society" in a normative way to designate a specific historical phase in the development of modern societies.¹ For these social scientists the challenge has always been to differentiate

1 Cf. Smit 2005.

between pluralism as a conceptual strategy and a vulnerable social achievement, and the popular embracement of vague diversity and plurality.²

Already in the late 1980s and early 1990s Smit helped theologians and church leaders in South Africa to distinguish between at least four discourses when they reflect upon the identity and public role of the church in modern societies (1996c:192-193). For Dirkie Smit a pluralistic society, firstly, includes stabilising structures such as the state, church, market economy and media, in which each system performs a function that is essential for the whole society. Secondly, a pluralistic society also includes dynamic, associational forms of community or civil societies. According to the German Reformed theologian, Michael Welker, true pluralistic societies combine a highly vulnerable potential for freedom with subtle and complex forms of social and cultural order (1994:21-27). Since pluralism sets out to establish this subtle form of order against both chaos and tyranny, it has (in terms of Welker's insight) two enemies, namely *authoritarianism* and *relativism*.

Thus, not all forms of pluralism are good and acceptable; on the contrary, Smit has seen the weaknesses and temptations of the recent pluralisation of South African society for churches very clearly. In his article "*Oor die openbare rol van die kerk,*" he warned against three major temptations for churches regarding their public engagements and responsibilities after the downfall of apartheid (1996c:198-199). The *first* possible response is to withdraw in a *fundamentalist* way to a simple world where complexity, relativity and difference no longer exist – a world where everything is clear and explainable from a single, authoritative source. The *second* possibility is a *vague, postmodern embrace of diversity* and a celebration of radical plurality and a delight in lack of community. The *third* temptation is to put religion and the church in the service of public life. In this latter role churches must suspend their unique character and they are asked to propagate values such as tolerance and nation-building. The best religion is the most helpful one – the so-called *civil religion*. In the fundamentalist and postmodern way the church is no longer involved in the public sphere. In the way of civil religion the church loses its unique identity. The churches are involved in public life, but no longer as church (1996c:199). In the next part of the article I will explore Smit's reading of the route that churches took after the abolition of apartheid in 1994 in the light of the pluralisation of South African society.

2. THE IMPACT OF PLURALISM AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF APARTHEID

2.1 Functional differentiation

As far as Dirkie Smit is concerned, what happened in South Africa after 1994 is much more dramatic and radical than just the change of government or the transformation of the political sphere. The whole fabric of society itself has been radically transformed and the process is still continuing. In his article "*Can we still be reformed?*" (2003b), Smit describes the radical transformation of South African public life as moving overnight from a basically pre-modern society to a typically modern one (2003b:239). For Smit this "*collapse into modernity*"³ implies a major shift in the make-up of our public sphere. At the heart of this lies the accelerated functional

2 For a detailed analysis of the potential and limits of pluralism as a conceptual strategy to deal with the radical plurality and ambiguity of contemporary global cultural, political, religious and theological situations, cf. Conradie 1992.

3 Smit often uses the expression "collapse into modernity" to describe the radical transformation of South African society (cf. 2004b:133). He borrows it from the authoritative work by German social theorist Ulrich Beck (1992). Cf. also U. Beck, 2000.

differentiation of the dominant subsystems of society. Politics, economy, the law, education and even religion, become increasingly independent from one another. The different systems increase their own effective functioning by seeking to limit their own spheres of operation, by loosening or doing away with the interconnections between themselves, and by giving up any orientation and loyalty to an overarching order. The consequence of this is that, like the rest of the Western world, our society no longer has a centre. “Society is organized pluralistically or poli-centrally” (2003b:240).

The effect of functional differentiation on the church and society is far-reaching. Smit emphasises that it has become almost impossible for religion to fulfil the overarching, integrating function that it had in pre-modern societies. Society has become secularised. Religion is *privatised* and is losing its place in public life. Its connections to other subsystems, such as politics, economic life, the public media, the legal system and public education, are seriously threatened (2003b:240).

Smit also shows that the privatisation of religion has led to the *marginalisation* of religion in public life and vice versa. According to him, it is especially the Reformed churches in South Africa that have lost their access to those institutions that were traditionally regarded as vehicles of the Reformed faith and tradition (2003b:241). These include educational institutions, such as schools, colleges and universities, diverse forms of public media, social welfare, medical services, the law and many other spheres of society. According to Smit, it is probably in education and public opinion-making that the impact has been most dramatic for the Reformed tradition and community (2003b:241).

In his article, “*On the impact of the church in South Africa*” (2004b), Smit concludes that, although the vast majority of South Africans are confessing Christians, there is on the surface not much Christian discourse, rhetoric, values and ideas to be discerned in *social and political life*. The new sacred canopy rather seems to be provided by liberal democracy, strongly individualistic human rights and the highly regarded Constitution. He describes the absence of Christian language and commitment in the public sphere as painful (2004b:148).

2.2 The religious role of global capitalism and the media

For Smit it is clear that the market and media systems are becoming all-devouring systems, even acquiring quasi-religious features themselves, crushing intra-societal and associational life forms. Regarding the market economy, he states: “The free market in the form of *global capitalism*⁴ seems to be the reigning idol, proclaimed and celebrated through popular culture and eagerly worshipped by many, even in various churches.”⁵ He is in agreement with the 23rd General Council of the WARC held in August 1997, Debrecen, Hungary, that the newly emerging global economy creates enslavement and injustice (2003a:485).

Concerning the *public media* and the formation of public opinion, the voice of the church has also been marginalised. Christians and churches are not seen to be part of the mainstream of voices forming and informing public opinion in South Africa today. Although the majority of citizens are

4 For an overview of Smit’s interpretation of the free-market economy on South African society, cf. 1996a, 2004c, 2004d, 2004f.

5 This does not mean for Smit that the church is silent. He is well aware that some churches, including the Ecumenical Movement in the form of the SACC, the Roman Catholic Church, and many member churches of the WARC indeed play a strong critical role. Much is done by way of analysis, discussing possibilities, education and distributing information. But all of this has little impact on the realities of the global economy. The impersonal, faceless nature of globalization leads to the marginalization and exclusion of Africa and especially of the poor of Africa; cf. Smit 2004b.

confessing Christians and probably deeply religious, the privatised role of religion in modern secular societies is continued in South Africa (2004b:149). For Smit the media can easily become *the* religious role-player in society because they propagate a new *moral ontology*:

“Deur die integrale rol van die media in die steeds veranderende lewe, in ‘n toenemend globaliserende, pluralistiese wêreld, dien, verbrei, propageer die media n ontologie - ‘n *morele ontologie*, insluitende ‘n antropologie, met selfs religieuse trekke, van ‘n soteriologie en eskatologie (gelukkige en gelukte menswees), en ‘n omvattende etos. Dit geskied óók deur die inhoud, maar dalk méér nog deur die meduim self en deur die funksies wat dit vervul, die waardes wat dit meebring en versterk, die perspektief, prioriteite en roeping wat dit suggereer, die vanselfsprekendhede wat dit vestig. In hierdie proses word talryke alternatiewe morele ontologieë deur die media ondermyn, geridikuleer en afgetakel” (Smit 2005:1).

The overall picture that emerges from Smit’s analysis is that the position of Christianity and Christian churches in society is an ambiguous one and that they no longer play a meaningful role in the present reconstruction and transformation of South African society. For Reformed people this represents a potential crisis, because it implies an uncertainty about their very identity.

2.3 A question of identity

For Reformed people a lack of clarity as to their vocation, calling, mission and purpose implies an uncertainty about their identity. In “*Can we still be Reformed?*” (2003b: 244-250), Smit shows convincingly that this crisis of identity is manifested in a variety of ways. It seems that church members are disillusioned with the claims of the church concerning the *Bible* and the church’s ability to interpret the *Bible*. Many members and ministers have lost their loyalty to the broader *structures* of the church. A very visible demonstration of these tendencies is their impact on *liturgy*. A wave of liturgical innovations has swept through many traditionally Reformed congregations, often inspired by the experiences of members in Pentecostal or charismatic congregations and by strong competition from nearby local mega-churches and by television broadcasts of local and American religious services. Smit believes that, since success has become the criterion for being church, the emphasis in liturgy has shifted towards entertainment. The net effect of these changes can generally be observed in a dramatic shift in *spirituality*. It is especially the absence of Reformed churches in the public debate about *morality and virtues* that signifies for Smit a crisis of identity.

It is clear that the pluralisation of the public sphere of South Africa is having an enormous impact on Christianity and that the *free-market economy* and the *media* are challenging Reformed churches on an *ontological* level and a level of *identity-construction*. A reading of Smit’s work suggests that for the church to respond properly to this challenge, the church must have a clear understanding of her own identity.

3. TO BE CHURCH IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

3.1 A strange identity

From one perspective the church is for Smit only one community among other communities in a pluralistic society. However, the church also has a unique public role and responsibility because of its unique identity. The church can only engage in public life as *church* (1996c:193). Smit emphasises that the uniqueness, difference and strangeness of the church often lead to clashes with the world in which believers live and therefore result in criticism of the church which in turn causes rejection, insinuations and slander that can lead to the exclusion and persecution of Christians.

3.2 Creation and recreation

The common point for Smit is that New Testament writers all agree that Christian communities have found a new identity in Christ, through the Spirit, which differentiates them from the society in which they find themselves. For Smit, in technical theological language, this new identity of Christians means that *creation* does not structure *recreation*. The Christian community is not just a religious variant of natural groups, movements and social strata. It is their common faith in Christ that, through one Spirit, makes Christians part of the church, i.e. Christ's body (1996b:128). Throughout the centuries the church, as it has done in New Testament times, strove to reformulate the difference between church and world in a new way, depending on the characteristics of the society in which they found themselves.⁶ For Smit, the identity, the fullness of the church, is *not fixed in a timeless formula* (2002a:250). Due to compelling changes in the world, active and involved Christian believers are always learning that they cannot merely follow and mirror new developments, but that they have to separate themselves through word, deed, witness and behaviour, and remain faithful, through the Spirit, to their identity in Christ.

3.3 The liturgy as alternative moral ontology

In Smit's Reformed understanding of the church, it can, in different times and circumstances, be required to emphasise and pursue different aspects of its identity. From Smit's realistic analysis of South African public life after 1994, it is clear that Reformed churches in the country are once again called upon to reflect and discern which aspects of their identity are to be brought into play and to *confess their faith* in the light of the ontologies presented by *global capitalism* and the *media*. It may be the four characteristics of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church; or the true proclamation of the Word; or the right serving of the sacraments, etc. I would like to suggest that a close reading of Dirkie Smit's recent publications show clearly that for him the right practice of the liturgy provides the best response to the homogenising tendencies of economic and media systems. But why is the liturgy so important for him? I will argue that this is because Smit espouses a specific view of the liturgy as the embodiment of an *alternative moral ontology* to that which global capitalism and the media present.

4. THE GOSPEL AS AN ALTERNATIVE ONTOLOGY

Dirkie Smit views the gospel and especially the liturgy as an alternative *moral ontology* that creates alternative moral identities. To illuminate this, I want to explore in a few broad strokes his appreciation of Karl Barth's link between prayer and ethics, or prayer and Christian witness, and show how this creates a lens for Smit through which the liturgy – in conversation with philosophers and theologians like Charles Taylor, Geoffrey Wainwright, Wolfgang Huber, and Nicholas Wolterstorff – can never be separated from *justice* in the public sphere.

Of course, Smit sees the public role of the church as being much broader than advancing its liturgy. In fact, influenced of Huber, he has a very nuanced and differentiated understanding of the church. The expression "church" for Smit refers to at least six different realities, forms, or configurations, namely the *worship service*, the *local congregation*, *organisational* and

6. The Belhar Confession, which developed in the old Dutch Reformed Missional Church in South Africa and with which Dirkie Smit was deeply involved, is for him a recent example of the reconstruction and renewed discovery of the distinctive identity of the Church. Cf. Smit 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2002b

institutional structures, the denomination, ecumenical bodies and sometimes *individual believers*. All these different forms of the church are very important when theologians reflect on the public responsibility of the church, but Smit definitely regards the worship service as the most underestimated, but also the most important form when reflecting on the unique identity of the church in public life (cf. 2003e:39-48).⁷

4.1 Prayer and Christian life (Karl Barth)

Through the work of John Webster, Smit understands the theological work of Karl Barth as creating an *alternative moral ontology* (2004a:807 and 2004e:120-145).⁸ By this he means that Barth's entire theology was a radical redescription of reality in the light of the Triune God. Barth was creating an alternative world for his readers with the implicit appeal, invitation, challenge, calling to live in this world. As far as Smit is concerned, in opposition to many other interpretations of Barth's work, Barth was deeply concerned with ethics, including politics, throughout his life and work. In his article "*The doing of the little righteousness – on justice in Barth's view of the Christian life*" (2004e), Smit gives an exposition of this link between prayer and ethics in the work of Barth. In this article he starts his exposition with Barth's "Warfield Lectures" in Princeton at the end of his academic career. In these lectures it is clear that Barth finds the heart of the Christian life in prayer, in invocation, in calling upon God, and therefore discusses the Christian life by reflecting on the different petitions of the Lord's Prayer. Why is this link between prayer and Christian life so important to Barth? Because:

"Christians can *look* only where they *see* God *looking* and try to live with no other purpose than that with which God acts in Jesus Christ. This means that the true and serious and finally important object of their attention, love and will and therefore of their thought, speech, and action, in agreement with their prayer and in correspondence with what they pray for, can only be human beings" (Barth in Smit 2004e:125).

Barth's concept of "*seeing*" also plays an important role in Smit's own linking of the liturgy and ethics (cf. Smit 1997. 2002c. 2003d). The followers of Jesus Christ are given to *see the world differently*. "Christians see people as human beings, as objects of the eternal covenantal love of the Triune God and never solely as causes, as members of this or that, not even as Christians or non-Christians, as good or bad. Christians see deeper, because they have learned to see human beings in the way the living God sees them" (Barth in Smit 2004e:134). From this it follows that the *church* is therefore liberated and called to this struggle for righteousness. Barth is not interested in abstractions, in theory, in principles. He sees the real church, the empirical, concrete church in the world as being called to this struggle. For Barth this implies that Christians confess their "solidarity with all human beings, at every point, as their friends and companions, without regard for the masks and disguises" (Barth in Smit 2004e:130). In the following pages it will become clear that Barth's link between prayer and ethics, between prayer and the search for justice in public life are fundamental in Smit's own struggle to come to terms with the reorientation of churches in a pluralistic society.

7 In Smit's more recent work the unity of the ecumenical church, in the light of economic globalization, has also become very important. Cf. e.g 1999b, 2003c, 2003e.

8 According to Smit, John Webster deals with this theme. He demonstrates in several works that any ethical section in Barth's work should be understood in terms of the purpose and thrust of the whole, and that the whole should be seen as a fundamentally ethical argument. Cf. Webster, 1995, 1998, 2000.

4.2 Moral ontology and moral identity (Taylor)

For Smit, following Barth and John Webster, the alternative moral ontology of the gospel implies an alternative moral identity. He makes the link between ontology, identity and morality through his appreciation of the work of the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor. Taylor formulates this link as follows:

“The moral space created by an alternative moral ontology, create the possibility for people to become moral agents, a subject, a self. Identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame within which the self can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done. To know who you are is to be orientated in moral space, a space in which questions arise about good or bad” (Taylor in Smit 2004a:887).

For Charles Taylor identity has to do with “mattering,” with the really important stuff of life. Identity is always socially and historically conditioned, formed in community with others, where “I” receive the “mattering” of life as part of a history, in a narrative. For Smit the liturgy is an alternative moral ontology, a narrative in which people receive “the mattering” of life:

“Geïmpliseer in die evangelie van die beloftes van die Drie-enige God, voordurend weer ontvang in die kerklike liturgie, en in die verkondiging, doop en nagmaal, is só ’n *morele ontologie*. En geïmpliseer in die spesifieke morele ontologie is só ’n morele identiteit. Die etiek kom dus nooit so onbemiddel na ons in die liturgie – byvoorbeeld in die vorm van konkrete voorskrifte, gebooe, norme of kasuïstiese wette nie – maar indirek en bemiddel, in die vorm van ’n alternatiewe morele ontologie met daarin verpak ’n alternatiewe morele identiteit” (2004a: 898).

For Smit there is a complex reciprocal relationship between liturgy and life, between worship and ethics.⁹ The ways in which this happens may differ from one liturgical tradition to another and one form of worship to another, but there are clear commonalities, not only between baptism and ethics, and between the Lord’s Prayer and ethics, but also between regular liturgical forms and ethics.

4.3 A remembering and hopeful community (Wainwright)

For Dirkie Smit the Christian church is unique because it worships God the Father, in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit (1996c:193). The Christian church originated from the continuous adoration of the Triune God. Public worship represents the place and time where the heart, the locus of the Christian church, can be found. He agrees with the famous ecumenical theologian, Geoffrey Wainwright, that the Christian Church is a story-telling-and-remembering community. The Christian church is not unique because there is story-telling, remembering and expectation, but in *what* story is told and *what* is remembered and expected.¹⁰ The church’s life is derived from a specific story, the story of the revelation of the Triune God. The most original activity of the Church is therefore to remember (Smit 1996b:122). Through remembering hope is born. Because people remember, they can hope.

9 Smit chooses the well-known phrase from the fourth century to express the relationship between prayer and confession, between liturgy and life, *lex orandi, lex credendi, and lex (con-) vivendi*. Cf. Smit 2004a.

10 Cf. Smit 1999a.

The liturgy of the church does not only help us to remember but also to *see*, to look at life with new eyes, with eyes of hope. But why is worship so important for teaching us to see, to look in the right direction?

4.4 Prayer, time and ethics (Huber)

For Smit it has to do with the “*Ungleichzeitigkeit der Religion*” in Christian worship. Here Smit (2002c:276) follows Wolfgang Huber in his understanding of liturgy and ethics. Worship has to do with time, with a combination of remembrance, hope and experience. In worship Christians remember and therefore they hope. And because of that they are transformed in the present. The “non-contemporaneity” of the Christian faith with everyday realities, the distance and tension, between the Christian faith and the present, make ethics possible. The tension, caused by the distance-in-time, is creative (“*schöpferisch*”). In this definition of ethics the believing community’s experiences are intimately related with one another. It has to do with tradition (memory, the past), hope (the future) and therefore with creative tension (the present). In all of this worship plays a crucial role.

4.5 Liturgy and the formation of public life

Through the liturgical actions of adoration, thanksgiving, petition, through sermons, through the experience of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, people learn to see differently. Why? Because there are *social processes* at work in the liturgy that have far-reaching implications for public life. Smit usually works with four such processes when he writes about liturgy and public life, namely *formation, subversion, community* and *calling* (cf. 2004a:898-904 and 1996b:119-129). Worship *forms* identity, collectively and individually. It forms communities of character and characters within community. Worship *subverts*, undermines and challenges existing social constructions of reality, making it possible for worshippers to see with new eyes, to look in other directions. Worship liberates from all kinds of fear and guilt, and empowers forms of service and love. Worship forms and strengthens new senses of community, of *koinonia*, creating new brothers and sisters, and new possibilities of relationship. Worship involves a sense of *calling*, of mission and purpose, of task and commitment (cf. Smit 1997).

4.6 Prayer, holiness and politics (Wolterstorff)

Smit (2002c:227-282) also finds himself attracted to the way the Reformed theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff links liturgy, holiness and *justice*. For Wolterstorff holiness is a preoccupation of Christian liturgy. He argues that there is no dichotomy between holiness and justice. God’s justice is a manifestation of his holiness, and our justice is a reflection of God’s holiness. When we deal with justice, we are dealing with the sacred. The preoccupation of the liturgy with holiness does not separate liturgy from justice, rather it binds liturgy and justice together. In liturgy we hymn God’s holiness. In lives of justice and mercy we reflect God’s holiness. Wolterstorff argues that the authenticity of the liturgy is conditioned by the quality of the ethical life of those who participate. Liturgy in the absence of justice does not please God: it nauseates God. This does not mean that justice is to displace liturgy. The relationship is rather a “not/unless” one. There is no authentic liturgy unless there is justice!

4.7 Liturgy that blinds (De Gruchy)

Smit also makes it very clear that the popularity of worship and spirituality in South Africa should not be idealised. The processes involved in worship can also be destructive. The Christian religion is a dangerous power that can blind people. He agrees with John de Gruchy that worship is an ambivalent phenomenon. In reality it is more a reflection of society than a critical and creative interruption of society (Smit 2002c:282). The impact of a specific type of worship and

congregational life may even be that believers lose all interest in public life, in serving others, in civil virtues.

At present the position of Christian churches in post-apartheid South Africa is ambiguous, complex and difficult to read (Smit, 2004b:128-149). For Smit the future is still open. Will the attendance of worship and participation in congregational activities remain popular in South-Africa? Will the impact of modernity in South Africa follow the same path as in many African countries, or will Western influences be more lasting in their effects? Will the patterns of worship and the forms of congregational life perhaps change? Will indigenous forms of worship, or Pentecostal, or perhaps Charismatic ways, in the long run perhaps gain popularity and grow, thereby reducing other forms? It is still too early to tell. However, what concerns Smit is that the recent shifts in patterns of liturgy and belonging will without any doubt have an impact on the kind of spirituality and ethics that will result.

5. THE FUTURE OF CHURCH AND THEOLOGY IN A PLURALISTIC SOUTH AFRICA

5.1 A moral ontology of difference

How does Dirkie Smit help churches to deal constructively with the radical pluralistic texture of South African society today? First of all, it is important to see that he affirms pluralism. The affirmation of pluralism in this way is actually the opposite of the relativistic position which holds that all views on life are so conditioned by their context that they are equally valid and equally invalid. That would be to take up a position outside all historical standpoints and traditions, and Smit in effect denies that this can be done. He is himself entirely committed to believing certain things about the way reality is – that is, he is committed to a moral *ontology*. The heart of this ontology could be summarised by saying that differences matter.

5.2 Theology as interdisciplinary activity

The problem with the process of modernisation in the Western world and South Africa is that economic and media systems are systematically proclaiming a universal and all-absorbing ontology, crushing the intersocietal plurality between systems, communities and persons, destroying the family system and pushing the church into the private sphere of people's lives, rendering religion the status of mere feelings without any social and political significance. Smit sees clearly that this implies an identity crisis for Reformed churches, which have through the centuries understood their very identity to be deeply involved in the construction of a just society.

A responsible public theology that wants to contribute to a culture of pluralism would therefore be a theology that engages in a creative and interdisciplinary way with the *economic* and *media* systems of our society. In order to create a pluralistic culture in a world where global capitalism and the media systems are creating a new ontology, worshipping the short-term comfort and pleasure of individuals, creating new forms of homogenisation and conformity, theologians, pastors and believers must learn to think theologically about economics.

In the light of the ontological claims of the media, the church must also rethink the different ways of speaking and acting in the public sphere. The church is indeed challenged to learn to speak in public, particularly in modern, democratic and pluralistic societies. This involves new processes of learning to think, listen and speak within the churches themselves, as well as new ways of participating in discussions and activities in the public arena and contributing to public opinion and civil society.¹¹

11 For different forms of communicative action, including different forms of confession, available to and practised by the church, cf. Arens 1989. For a very helpful reflection on the challenge to the church to rethink its traditional ways of issuing authoritative declarations, cf. De Villiers and Smit 1995.

5.3 Identity and liturgy

Smit's greatest contribution to the debate on the future role of the church – church that tries to bring diverse forms of community and normativity together in a complex, pluralistic society, while guarding against falling into the trap of uniformity or vague plurality – is his argument that the unique identity of the church as church must be confirmed in a positive way in every new context. For Smit that means in that a liberal South Africa, the liturgy must be taken seriously as it creates cultural spaces which shape and mark human life no less than natural spaces do. As a theologian he understands the gospel as a moral universe, mediated by the liturgy, creating new identities, helping people to see differently and act in new ways. The important point is that liturgy can also blind people and separate them from the pain and injustices of the world around them; the implication here is that the right practising of the liturgy can never be separated from holiness and therefore from the search for justice in public life!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arens, E. 1989. *Bezeugen und Bekennen*. Düsseldorf: Patmos.
- Beck, U. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.
- 2000. *What is Globalization?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Conradie, E. M. 1992. "The Powers and Limits of Pluralism in Theology." *Scriptura* 40, pp. 40-64.
- De Villiers, D. E. & D.J. Smit. 1995. "Met watter gesag sê ons hierdie dinge?" Opmerkings oor kerklike dokumente oor die openbare lewe." *Skrif en Kerk* 16(1), pp. 39-56.
- Smit, D. J. 1996c. "Oor die unieke openbare rol van die kerk." *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, Jaargang 36/3, pp. 190-204.
- 1996a. "Reformed ethics and economic justice." *NGTT*, XXXVII/3, pp. 438-455.
- 1996b. "Oor die kerk as 'n unieke samelewingsverband." *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, Jaargang 36/2, pp. 119-129.
- 1997. "Liturgy and life? On the importance of worship for Christian ethics", *Scriptura: Christian Ethics in South Africa*, D. E. de Villiers (ed). 1997. 62, pp. 259-280.
- 1998. "Apartheid." In H. D. Betz, Don S. Browning, B. Janowski & E. Jüngel. 1998. *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Band 1). Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), pp. 580-582.
- 1999a. "Spirituality, worship, confession and church unity" In Cunningham, D.S. et al. (eds). 1999. *Ecumenical theology in Worship, doctrine and life*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 271-281.
- 1999b. "Visie, motief, weë - Geoffrey Wainwright oor die eenheid van die kerk." *Skrif en Kerk*, 1999/2, pp. 414-440.
- 2000a. "Social transformation and confessing the faith? Karl Barth's views on confession revisited." *Scriptura* 72, 2000:1, pp. 76-86.
- 2000b. "Versoening - en Belhar?" *Gereformeerde Teologiese Tijdschrift*, 2000/4, pp. 159-174.
- 2002a. "Deel van 'Kerk' deur die eeue? – die werklike kerk op soek na die ware kerk?" In Nell, I. & C.W. Burger (reds). 2002. *Draers van die waarheid: Nuwe Testamentiese visies vir die gemeente*. Stellenbosch: Buvton, pp. 243-258.
- 2002b. "Historiese achtergronden." In *De Belijdenis van Belhar en haar betekenis voor ons*. Brussel: VPBK, pp. 12 – 15.
- 2002c. "Seeing Things Differently" - On Prayer and Politics." In Holness, L. & R.K. Wüstenberg (eds). 2002. *Theology in Dialogue: The Impact of the Arts, Humanities, and Science on Contemporary Religious Thought*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, pp. 271-284.
- 2003a. "A time for confession? On the WARC project 'Reformed faith and economic justice.'" *NGTT*, 3 & 4, pp. 478-499.
- 2003b. "Can we still be Reformed? Questions from a South African perspective." In W. Alston & M. Welker (eds). 2003. *Reformed theology: Identity and ecumenicity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, pp. 233-253.
- 2003c. "Living unity? On the ecumenical movement and globalization." *Reformed World* 53, pp. 192-209.
- 2003d. "On learning to see? A Reformed perspective on the church and the poor." In Couture, P. & Miller-McLemore (eds). 2003. *Suffering, Poverty, and HIV-AIDS: International Practical Theological Perspectives*. Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, pp. 55-70.
- 2003e. "Openbare getuienis en publieke teologie vandag? Vrae oor verskeie vanselfsprekende voorveronderstellings." *Scriptura* 82, pp. 39-48.

- 2004a. “Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex (con)vivendi? – Oriënterende inleiding tot liturgie en etiek.” *NGTT*, pp. 887-907.
 - 2004b. “On the impact of the church in South Africa after the collapse of the apartheid regime.” In K. Bediako (et al). 2004. *A new day dawning. African Christians living the gospel*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, pp. 128-149.
 - 2004c. “Oor die kerk en maatskaplike uitdagings in ons land.”, *NGTT* 45, 2. Supplementum, pp. 350-362,
 - 2004d. “Sien, nadink, doen? Oor teologie en armoede.” *NGTT* 45, 2. Supplementum, pp. 180-196.
 - 2004e. “...The doing of the little righteousness’ – On justice in Barth’s view of the Christian life.” In M. Welker, M & C. Jarvis (eds). 2004. *Loving God with our minds. Festschrift for Wallace Alston*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, pp. 120-145.
 - 2004f. “Theologische Ansätze für kirchliches Engagement in Fragen der Globalisierung. Reformierte Perspektiven aus dem Südlichen Afrika.” *?kumenische Rundschau* 2004/2, 53. Jhrg., pp. 160-175.
 - 2005. “Media en etiek in ‘n pluralistiese samelewing?” Voordrag tydens Inter-dissiplinêre Konsultasie, Departement Joernalistiek, Stellenbosch met Etiek Navorsingsgroep, *BUVTON*, 13 September 2005.
- Webster, J. 1998. *Barth’s moral theology. Human action in Barth’s thought*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- 2000. *Barth*. New York: Continuum.
 - 1995. *Barth’s ethics of reconciliation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Welker, M. 1994. *God the Spirit*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

KEYWORDS

DJ Smit
 Pluralism
 Global capitalism and media
 Identity and liturgy

TREFWOORDE

DJ Smit
 Pluralisme
 Globale kapitalisme en media
 Identiteit en liturgie

Dr. A.L. Compaan
 Bus 809
 Durbanville
 Tel: 021-9766864; 083-381-7002
 E-pos: auke@iafrica.com