

# Foreword

Theology contemplates 'life in its fullness'. From different theological disciplines the theme of 'life' is often being dissected in order to seek avenues of meaning and fullness. The reality, though, is that life offers a variety of experiences between the ultimate polarity between brokenness and fullness, between life and death, good and bad, pain and healing, or ill-being and well-being. There is no exception in this experience in whatever global context people find themselves.

This book provides a coherent and conceptual portrayal of aspects regarding the theological research theme, entitled *Ecodomy* (literally meaning to 'build a house'). In its figurative meaning the umbrella term *Ecodomy* comprises 'life in its fullness', from aspects of brokenness to aspects of wholeness. From various theological disciplines, namely Old Testament Studies, New Testament Studies, Systematic Theology, Church History and Practical Theology both the aspects of brokenness and wholeness are addressed theologically and exemplary.

The book comprises two parts with the overarching themes of 'brokenness' and 'wholeness' providing a key focus on each part. Every chapter is written from the point of view of a specific theological discipline, while the combination of the theological disciplines addresses the brokenness and wholeness of life as coherent concept throughout the book. One pole does not exclude the other and therefore every chapter reflects an interwovenness of these two polar themes. In the first part 'brokenness' is described in terms of current or recent very relevant societal challenges, such as racism and xenophobia, apartheid, foreignness and exclusivism, leadership crisis and violence. In contrast, in the second part, 'wholeness' is embedded in themes such as the African concept of 'ubuntu', a life of faith and wisdom, reconciling leadership, or transforming space and community. Ultimately, a Greek term ἀναίδειαν is connected to the meaning of *ecodomy* and 'life in its fullness'.

In short, the various scholarly contributions entail the following.

In the first part **Jerry Pillay** contemplates how racism and xenophobia have become a worldwide issue and challenge. The recent flood of immigrants and refugees

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into Europe and America has put this matter on the world map. In South Africa racism and xenophobia have, in recent times, reached explosive proportions and have greatly intensified the need for the Church to get more deeply involved in the creation of racial harmony and peace as these work towards the fullness of life for all people. This chapter explores the challenges of racism and xenophobia in South Africa and concludes by discussing the role of the Church in combating these realities. The chapter challenges current thinking on the issues of racism and xenophobia and has the potential to enlighten churches, religious organisations, NGOs and government on how to engage with them. On an intra-disciplinary level this challenge transcends the theological disciplines of Systematic Theology and Ethics, Missiology and Church History. By contemplating these themes, it offers interdisciplinary implications for the field of psychology, sociology and human and community development in respect of the changing human behaviour and society, with the apartheid era and the German National Socialism history as parallel examples of human 'brokenness'.

**Piet Meiring** describes the role of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and similar South African theologians to address this polarity from their various contexts. Although Dietrich Bonhoeffer never visited South Africa, the relevance of this German theologian for South Africa was never in doubt. In the struggle against apartheid his message served to guide theologians, church leaders, and lay Christians alike. His life and his death inspired many during their darkest hours. Theologians, with John de Gruchy in the lead, studied his works extensively. Heroes from the struggle, like Beyers Naudé, Desmond Tutu, Steve Biko, even Nelson Mandela, were hailed as latter-day Bonhoeffers. At ecumenical gatherings, his teachings were often invoked. But it was especially in the aftermath of apartheid, when the very serious challenges of reconciliation and nation building, of healing and forgiveness, of amnesty for perpetrators weighed against the demands of justice for the victims were at stake, that many turned again to Bonhoeffer's life and work for guidance. Meiring, who served as member on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), discusses the prerequisites for reconciliation in South Africa against the backdrop of the TRC experience, emphasising the need for South Africans, following in the footsteps of Bonhoeffer, to look for 'costly reconciliation'.

**Gerda de Villiers** examines the concept of *Ecodomy* – life in its fullness – as it unfolds in the Book of Ruth. The book is dated to the post-exilic period in the history of Israel, and is read as narrative critique against the Moabite paragraph in Deuteronomy 23:3–5,

and against the way that this text is interpreted and implemented in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Naomi, Ruth and Boaz, the protagonists in the narrative, become paradigmatic for the situation in post-exilic Israel. Their stories, dealing with loss and death, and the actions they take in order to heal the brokenness become indicative for the post-exilic Israelite community. As the narrative plot develops, the chapter aims to indicate how 'life in its emptiness' is changed into 'life in its fullness' by the courage and creative initiative of individuals, even if it means overstepping boundaries and challenging the social conventions of the time. Against the exclusivist policy of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Book of Ruth argues that foreigners may be included in the community of YHWH and that their solidarity with Israel is to the benefit of all God's people. The contribution of the chapter emphasises that life in its fullness cannot be taken for granted, but requires human efforts.

From the discipline of Practical Theology **Christo Thesnaar** offers a specific focus on religious leadership and its role and commitment to reconciliation. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee's (TRC) re-enactment consultation afforded the opportunity to reflect on the leadership of religious leaders during the apartheid era, and in the years that followed. This chapter shows particular interest in the prophetic leadership provided by religious leaders during apartheid, and the 20 years following the transition by engaging with some normative thoughts on prophetic dialogue. Findings on this kind of leadership provided during the post-TRC period are reflected upon in terms of reconciliation through the hermeneutical lens of the Belgian scholar Valarie Rosoux. Hereby, Thesnaar seeks to show a way towards reconciliation and national unity in the current South African context with some strategic conclusions. He reiterates that the process of reconciliation becomes a priority for all faith communities across the nation. In this way 'brokenness' could turn slowly into 'wholeness'.

By taking a socio-historical approach, **Zorodzai Dube** attempts to trace some history from World War II (WWII) and illustrates various instances in which economic and political activities intersect with theological themes. For example, after WWII and in view of the aftermath of war, it seems, the dominant paradigm in theology tilted towards moral economy, focusing on issues of fairness, justice and peace. Also, the triumph of global capitalism since 1989 provides the discursive space where theology provides injunctions on matters of fairness and justice – a perspective which agrees with the central message of narratives around Jesus of Nazareth.

The second part of the book illustrates aspects of life's 'wholeness' against the backdrop of its 'brokenness'. The content of the contributions comprise the following:

**Wayne Smith** foregrounded the African concept of ubuntu, which encompasses a philosophy of communal care and engagement of the individual. This exposition of ubuntu is engaged in a conversation with the speculative philosophy of organism ('process') to acquire an extended tool by which to engage within its ontology the widest possible range of human interaction. The engagement by ubuntu's relational doctrine of the speculative philosophical cosmology of A.N. Whitehead placed portions of the latter's constructs at the service of ubuntu's transversal capacity to examine and apply the deepest understanding of its own etymology. It has been a challenge to understand occasions of injustice and suffering which have manifested within the same African culture that has given to the world the language and concept of ubuntu. It has been commonplace to isolate the utopian relational ontology implicit in the aphorism from occasions of the worst of human nature. It was the premise of this chapter that an understanding of an ubuntu which excludes dystopian occasions has done a disservice to the breadth, depth and height of what is to be fully human – including occasions of suffering and antisocial behaviours.

Old Testament wisdom literature encourages the reader to do the right thing at the right time in order to behave wisely and to enhance happiness, wealth, justice and all kinds of well-being of human life. **Pieter Venter** argues that the Books of Proverbs and Daniel seem to present opposite viewpoints on what life should be. Proverbs propagates a life of faith, wisdom and participation in the orderly world God created. Daniel's advice is to wait upon God in this chaotic world. These seemingly two opposing viewpoints are exposed here. It is proposed by Venter that they are to be read in dialogue with each other. Their juxtaposition presents a lifestyle that is optimistic as well as realistic trusting upon God's superior reign. Such a lifestyle brings about or enhances the 'wholeness' of a broken life.

**Johan van der Merwe** describes the role that leadership of the Dutch Reformed Church played in the years 1990–1994 en route to the first democratic election in South Africa. During these four years – in which South Africa was on the brink of a civil war – meetings between church leaders, who became known for their support of the notorious policy of apartheid, and the leader of the ANC, Nelson Mandela, took place. Mandela requested these leaders at several meetings to play a reconciliatory role

between different political parties and groups in South Africa. It also led to Mandela addressing the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (1994). Mandela's visit to the synod as well as the visits of Ben J. Marais and C.F. Beyers Naudé became controversial in the aftermath of that meeting. This controversy surrounding the synod meeting, popularly known as the 'Synod of reconciliation' is also addressed. Imbedded between two important markers, namely the Rustenburg church consultation (1990) and the special day for churches at the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (1997), this chapter concludes that the meeting was indeed a 'Synod of reconciliation'. Prophetic leadership during the proceedings of that meeting had challenged the Dutch Reformed Church to be part of reconciliation in the new democratic South Africa. The brokenness of an apartheid system was challenged by reconciliatory leadership.

**Tanya van Wyk** proposes a political-theological and hermeneutical reflection on the origin, nature, intention and contribution of research themes within the dynamics of an institutional space. This is done by taking a critical look at the 'rules' and the 'game' of university academia. Specific reference is made to two institutional and faculty research themes, namely 'reconciling diversity' and '*Ecodomy*' – 'life in its fullness'. The institutional academic space is compared to a Hunger Games style *panopticon*, with its 'rules' and 'play'. It is argued that these research themes can only make an authentic contribution if the 'play' and the 'game' of the space in which these themes originate, are deconstructed. If this deconstruction can take place, there might be an authentic chance for unhindered dialogues towards the transformation of the academic space and the greater community it serves. Currently, where South African universities find themselves in the turmoil of student uprisings and political instability this chapter offers helpful insights into rethinking the broken past in order to establish new paradigms for a more whole future.

The final chapter by **Ernest van Eck** and **Robert van Niekerk** offers reflections on a Greek term, which contributes to the understanding of *Ecodomy* – 'life in its fullness'. The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it presents a comprehensive picture of the meaning of the term *ἀναίδειαν* in extant papyrological evidence. The conclusion reached is that the term, as is the case in early Jewish and patristic writings, the LXX, Graeco-Roman literature and in early Christian writings, always carries a negative and pejorative meaning. This meaning of the term is then used to interpret the occurrence of *ἀναίδειαν* in the parable of the Friend at Midnight. Secondly, as part of a publication that celebrates the centenary of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria (2017), a few

remarks are made with regard to the Faculty of Theology's Faculty Research Theme, *Oikodome – Life in its fullness*, and the attitude of *ἀναίδειαν* as depicted in the parable.

In an exemplary way, these ten scholarly contributions serve as an academic offering of gratitude for 100 years of 'brokenness' and 'wholeness' experienced in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria since 1917. With the Faculty Research Theme, entitled *Ecodomy*, these contributions are meant to celebrate 'life in its fullness' from the wide range of theological disciplines during the centenary year.

**Prof. Dr Dirk J. Human**

Deputy Dean, Faculty of Theology  
Head of Department, Old Testament Studies  
University of Pretoria  
South Africa