

The God of the cross is *One*: Engaging the theology of Bram van de Beek

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The Dutch theologian, Bram van de Beek, has a radical Christological emphasis in his theology. In this world, we see the cross of Jesus. Essentially, God is *One*. The Father is the Father of the Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit works primarily in the church and is not a general spirit or a spirit of goodwill. By participating in Jesus' death and resurrection, the believer receives salvation. Van de Beek is of the opinion that understanding evolution is necessary and that evil in this world should also be regarded in the light of the cross. He is open to criticism in the light of his position on God and the creation regarding the view that death and evil are present from the beginning. One must, however, accept his Christological stance and his view that God is *One*, as highly acceptable.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article is largely in the field of systematic theology, but mission studies is also relevant in interdisciplinary interaction.

Keywords: God; *One* Christology; evolution; evil; salvation.

Introduction

Bram van de Beek is a well-known Dutch Systematic Theologian. Abraham 'Bram' van de Beek,¹ born on 09 October 1946 in Lunteren, The Netherlands, was a professor in Biblical and Systematic Theology at Leiden University and professor in Christian Symbolism at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He studied for a Master's degree in Theology under Arnold van Ruler at Utrecht University, and obtained a DTh in 1980 at Leiden University under the supervision of Hendrikus Berkhof. He was also minister in the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands. In 1997, Van de Beek was elected a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. He also holds a doctorate in botany. Some regard him as an orthodox and even an evangelical reformed theologian. He emphasises the pre-Nicaean Fathers, but his views on issues, such as evolution, the fall and suffering, and a return to the Roman Catholic Church, are often not regarded as classical reformed theology. He wrote a series of highly acclaimed systemic theologies entitled *Spreken over God* Talking about God. His emphasis on Jesus on the cross in the suffering world received a great deal of attention.

He writes extensively on an aspect of theology that is neglected by contemporary theologians, namely that God is revealed by the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ, the crucified *One*. As a prolific writer and challenging author, he remains one of the most important present-day systematic theologians, not only in the Netherlands but also globally. It is impossible to enter into the most essential current debates in theology without regarding his contribution.

The proclamation that God of the cross is *One* is essential in his understanding of the Christian Gospels. This means that God in Christ is revealed as *One*. God is revealed in Jesus on the cross. This aspect of his theology is important for all other issues regarding the explanation of the revelation of God. God is *One!* God is the only *One*, as in the Sjema in Deuteronomy. All honour belongs to God. God's redemption is given to us by grace. Consequently, issues regarding the different aspects of theology are all viewed in the sense of the seminal confession that God is *One*. Van de Beek writes extensively about the Trinity, Christology, the Father, the Spirit, the Body of Christ, creation, eschatology, violence and the church.

Van de Beek on the Trinity

Van de Beek believes that one should always start with Jesus Christ, the *One* on the cross. He thus starts his theological discussion with Christology, followed by Pneumatology and Patrology. Van de Beek's absolute foundation is that God is *One*, and that there is no other emphasis from

1. For this biographical information, see www.Wikipedia in English and Dutch.

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scripture and the early church fathers than the confession that God is *One*. Van de Beek relates his theology radically to the early church fathers. Although he enters into discussion with theologians such as Calvin, his main focus is the early fathers. This means that he has this specific view of the Trinity. He differs from the Cappadocians, because he regards them as moving away from the central issue that God is *One* (Van de Beek 1998:70–71).

Van den Brink and Erp (2009) wrote in this regard:

Van de Beek's theology is characterized by a very strong and sustained christological emphasis. A favourite quotation of his is from the Roman bishop Zephyrinus (in office ad 198/9–217): 'I know only one God, Jesus Christ, and no one else than the One who was born and did suffer.' This (some would say: rigid) identification of the true God with the suffering Jesus makes Van de Beek suspicious of the Cappadocian contribution to the development of trinitarian doctrine. The formulations of the Cappadocians miss the intensity and edginess of Athanasius. Christ as the incarnate Word is not tied as closely to the Father.... (p. 87)

According to Van de Beek, the essence of the proclamation of the gospel should be that God is *One* as revealed in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are radically *One*, without proclaiming modalism where God reveals himself first as the Father, then as the Son, and then as the Holy Spirit (Van de Beek 1998:46–48). He maintains the difference between the three persons of the Trinity.

The confession regarding Christ is most important for this unity. In this regard, Van de Beek (1998:36–38) explains that Christ is *One* with God in the sense of homoousios and not of homoiousios. The central issue is that Christ is the full embodiment of God as emphasised by Athanasius (Van de Beek 2010:306). Though he does not accept modalism, he clearly states that the fullness of the divinity of Christ can be noted in the unity of the Father and the Son. Jesus is Lord! (1998:122). For Van de Beek (2020c:15), this is the most essential confession of the church. He is the Lord above all others, and one should regard all aspects of the church's life in this light (Van de Beek 2020c:15). Philippians 2:5–11 plays an important role in his theology in this respect. Every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord. This is true of the monotheistic God in Isaiah 45:23 (Van de Beek 2020c:14). One cannot divide the Son and the Father if one considers this pericope, because the Son will also be honoured in the same way as the Father. The confession is clear: Jesus is Lord (Van de Beek 1998:123). This proclamation of the unity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit can be accepted in the Christological view of theology. Christ is the *One* who reveals the fullness of God; therefore, the divinity of Christ should not be challenged (Van de Beek 2020c:24). This is the essence of theology. In this sense, it differs totally from contemporary theologians who often view the divinity of Christ as non-essential. One must understand, according to Van de Beek, that Christ's glory should be noted in the fact that he yielded himself in this world, emphasising the importance of Philippians 2.

With regard to the trend in many contemporary theologies that focus on the public or political nature of theology, Van de Beek mentions that God does not improve the world. There are no signs that the world became or will become a better place. On the contrary, in many instances, the world is getting even worse. Humanity cannot be regenerated except by God who came to be present in the misery. It is very important to note that Van de Beek does not reject positive developments such as in the medical field. He is of the opinion that essentially the world is not renewed. Sin, as a complex issue, is still rampant (Van de Beek 1998:26). Christ became a slave in this world by humbling himself, giving up something so that he became fully human and, in this sense, also present in the world. In this sense, one can note the total humanity of Christ (Van de Beek 2020c:26). God is present in this concrete human person with all his humanity (Van de Beek 2020c:26). But this is a humanity of the suffering Christ, and one can only meet Christ in his suffering. God carries the world in all its suffering. In this instance, Van de Beek (1998:26) follows Athanasius. Christ is a suffering Lord in this world, the crucified God (Van de Beek 1998:31) and, in this world, we see the cross. God is regarded as on the cross (Van de Beek 2018a:11). At best, Christ bears the world without becoming a sinner (Van de Beek 1998:42). The explanation of the resurrection is important, but the resurrection is an eschatological event. Jesus is risen and raised, and his resurrection is bodily because he died in the body and was raised in the body. It is the confirmation of his life and the atonement (Van de Beek 1998:167–170). The resurrection confirms the gospel of the cross (Van de Beek 2018a:17). It is not an event of this world, because, although bodily, it is eschatological. This world is under the cross; this world is struggling under the cross and in this world, we see the powers of sin and death. Christ yielded under this power of sin and death, and had to give himself up in order to become human under these powers (Van de Beek 1998:156–157). To follow Christ in this world also means to follow him in his suffering. He gave himself unto death; to understand Christ in this world is to see him as the suffering servant of God. The believer's freedom is to follow Christ in his suffering (Van de Beek 2018a:131).

Van de Beek (2018a:18) continues to explain that Christology without suffering is not real Christology and that participating in Jesus' death is true faith. Grace is essential in order to be saved. He explains that the classical view of reformed theologians was that Jesus is not only an example of how to live, but that he is the salvation (Van de Beek 2020c:51). He died for all people. He took the whole human community upon himself (Van de Beek 2020c:54). Grace is to die with Jesus and be raised with him. Participating in his death, one receives the grace of God so that one is also never separated from the love of God. One dies with Christ and is raised with Christ (Van de Beek 2020c:57). Understanding Christ without his suffering is not understanding Christ at all. In this world, Christ must be viewed as the suffering servant of God. In this sense, it must be understood that Christ calls upon his followers to suffer with him in this world. Christ calls one to suffer, and where there is no suffering, the whole concept of

true Christianity must be challenged. It is important to emphasise that one believes in the God of the cross. Challenged in this world, one accepts that God is *One* but one must also explain that one belongs to God and believes in God. In this world we are engaged by the reality of death.

Van de Beek (2008b) opines in this regard:

God a God of death? He is the God of life. However, He is so by death. Without the story of death, no life is possible for people who are caught in the knot of victim and perpetrator. The story of God is the story of death. It is about his own death in Jesus Christ. He who is the head of all has died on the cross. The cross is not mere suffering. It is, first of all, an instrument of execution. The cross is punishment to death. The ultimate judgment about human life is a judgment to death. That is the only way to get rid of foe past, this surrender to death is the gate to life because Christ has risen from death. He who is Life itself gave Himself to death in order to save those who lived in the perspective of death. That means that reconciliation cannot happen without atonement, there is no shared future without the death of the perpetrator and even the death of the victims, who never get rid of their wounded life except by death, therefore, the cross is punishment and suffering in one – the fate of perpetrator and victim in one and the same event. (p. 25)²

It is important to realise that Jesus is a Jew. The salvation is from the Jews. Jesus is the Messiah of suffering. One must also regard the suffering of the Jews in the light of their circle around the Messiah (Van de Beek 2020c:65ff.).

Concerning the Spirit, Van de Beek (2012:396–397) is of the opinion that it must be emphasised that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit comes from Christ, and the Spirit is sent forth by Christ. Christ is also the Spirit. But he does not accept Filioque, because God is *One* and there are no two instances of the revelation of God (1998:65 and 121). The Son is not limited, but the revelation of the Spirit comes by the Father. The Father sends his Spirit through the Son into the world so that people can accept and understand Christ, the Word, in this world. The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of the new world. In this sense, there is a significant difference between the views of Van de Beek and, for example, those of Welker and other reformed theologians who regard the revelation of the Spirit in the whole cosmos as essential (2012:428). Van de Beek (2012:394–396) does not regard the Spirit in this way. He is of the opinion that the Spirit works in the church. The church is the body of Christ, and the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and, in this sense, the Spirit is the body of Christ (Van de Beek 2012:420–423). The Spirit is consequently the Spirit in the church and the Spirit reveals Christ in the church. In the church, the Spirit works, renews and leads forth into the world of suffering. He does not reject the world. God is totally involved in the world, but the Spirit is not the Spirit of the world. This differs from the views of Welker (1994:331ff.) and others who view the Spirit as working in the whole world and bringing about new life by emphasising and empowering renewal. The Spirit working in the world brings about a new situation in the world (cf. Verster 2020:68ff.).

2. See the explanation of this view in Verster (2020:179–182).

Van de Beek does not reject the working of the Spirit but he sees it from the perspective of the church.

Van de Beek (2013) states:

The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. This means the Spirit of the Crucified. Jesus's promises of the Spirit in the gospel of John are given in the perspective of his death on the cross. It is this Spirit that is given on Pentecost, and the book of Acts has no other paradigm. When the Spirit is poured out on the apostles, they start preaching, and the climax of the very first sermon in the church that sets the tone for all further preaching is 'this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2:36). That is the focus of the Spirit's work in the world: confronting people with Jesus and Him crucified. The people in Jerusalem were perturbed by this confrontation. Many of them were converted – and many of them revolted against this message, as indicated in the subsequent chapters. Both the religious and the political leaders revolted. In the gospel. (p. 259)

It is also important that God the Father is the Father of the suffering Son. In this sense, God the Father and God the Son is *One* (Van de Beek 2017:72). The Father is also the Father of the suffering Son (Van de Beek 2017:285–287). Therefore, one must see the work of the Father in the sense of the *One* who sends his suffering child into the world. God is not, in the Aristotelian sense, the unmovable mover, but he is totally engaged in this world, in the sense that he is also part of the world and of what is being done in this world. To live with the Father is to live with Jesus (Van de Beek 2017:289).

Concerning the communicable and non-communicable attributes of God, Van de Beek (2017:203–206) opines that God is incomprehensible. Even when communicable attributes such as goodness is explained, the difference between us and God is clear; also when one speaks of something such as love. God is totally incomprehensible because he reveals himself in Christ on the cross. This is totally unexpected and also non-communicable. There one sees the incomprehensible God.

God is also the Almighty. This confession is extremely important. There is no other God besides God. He is almighty in relation to whom he is and he is the Father of Jesus Christ, the suffering servant (Van de Beek 2020c:259). Van de Beek (2014a) writes:

God is a "strange" father. He did not save his own Son, because He gave priority to his enemies. This involved the sufferings of the cross. We cannot understand the full extent of this event, but we know that it was necessary for our salvation. (p. 126)

Van de Beek on the body of Christ

For Van de Beek (2020c:155), the Spirit is present in the church. Similarly, the Spirit is also present in the world in the same sense as Jesus Christ is more than his bodily existence (extra Calvinisticum). The Spirit is not a general spirit of goodwill. The cosmological implications of the Spirit are thus not accepted. The Spirit works in the sacraments, in baptism, and in the Eucharist. Therefore, the Eucharist and

baptism should link Christians to be one, as God is *One*. There should not be divisions in the church; the church should be one at the table of the Lord. The church should find oneness in the love of God and in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The body of Christ and the body of the true Spirit, together, honour Christ and honour God to live in this relation in the presence of God. They also relate the fullness of Christ and the fullness of God in the Eucharist. There cannot be divisions in the Eucharist. It should be there for all believers, and all should become part of Christ in the Eucharist. In baptism, there can be no divisions, because baptism is baptism in Christ through the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist, and baptism links one another to the Living Christ. Van de Beek (2008c:257) writes: 'Because Christians belong to Jesus, they are strangers too. And because they refuse to adjust to the world, they remain strangers and thus are rejected by the world'. (cf. Verster 2017:223ff.).

The church is often regarded as an alternative community. Although Van de Beek (2020c:188) understands this as an important view, he differs from it in two respects. Firstly, it does not accept that human beings remain human beings as well as Christians. Even in an 'alternative community', human beings remain human beings in sin. Secondly, it is essentially dualistic, namely the world is evil and the church is good. One cannot accept this view, because God is the God of the universe.

Van de Beek on creation and the fall

What are the implications of creation? If Van de Beek does not accept the cosmological implications of the Spirit, what is his understanding of creation? He understands creation as a preliminary aspect. It is preliminary to the new world that God will bring about. This creation is on its way to the fullness of God (Van de Beek 1996:155ff.) Therefore, this is only part of the fullness of our human existence. It will be changed, it will be totally different, and this world will come to an end. This means that this world is not the final abode and it is imperative for Van de Beek to understand that this world is not the world of final consummation; this world is not the final world. The world of God, the world where God is, is the final world in which one has to experience the wonders of God. This world is under the curse, and we live in this world as people who long for the day when this world will pass, and we will enjoy the fullness of the glory of God. God bears the world, because he is the *One* who is responsible for the world.

This indicates the importance of eschatology. Eschatology is Christ. Van de Beek is of the opinion that eschatology means that something totally new will come in God, that this world will not progress into a new world. This world will come to an end, but something new will be created by God – A totally new creation. This present creation will pass, and a totally new creation will emerge. Veldsman (2013:21) shows that Van de Beek rejects the view of creation as intelligent design because of the problem of suffering that cannot be

explained in the ID view (see an explanation of his views in Verster 2017:174ff.).

One of the most challenging aspects of Van de Beek's theology is his views on sin, the fall, and evolution. According to him, Adam did not fall into sin from a righteous state, but he fell into sin because he was a sinner (Van de Beek 2020c:221). His free will must be seen in this regard. Again, this must be viewed in the light of the cross. Creation is radically linked to the cross. It is not good in the sense of perfection, but good in the sense that it is an environment wherein life can exist.

Van de Beek (2011) writes:

Christians often reject the evolutionary origin of humanity because they believe that it denies the fall into sin of the first human, the opposite is true: especially an evolutionary approach implies a first human who became aware of guilt and transferred not only the capability of guilt to offspring but also the reality of a humanity that did not meet standards it should attain. Secular people should not reject the church's idea of original sin as absurd if they keep to evolution consistently. They probably will not call human immorality 'sin,' but they cannot avoid considering human consciousness of guilt as part of the evolution of primates. If not, the base of the system of evolution will collapse, because any characteristic of living beings is part of the evolutionary process. (p. 210)

Regarding the public theology by some exponents who emphasises this world, Van de Beek is of the opinion that one must be cautious about viewing theology in this sense. Although public theology and ethics should not be regarded as being equivalent, there are implications for each. Van de Beek (2020a:3) writes:

For the early fathers, Christian ethics was not an alternative on the market of worldviews, human traditions, and their corresponding ways of life. It was not about the application of a Christian philosophy as a model for society. Christian life is founded on the new reality, which dawned with Christ. Ethics did not arise from his teaching, but from his identity and from the liberating reality, which came through his death and resurrection. Because people participate in Christ, they participate in his life, and this becomes visible in their actions. The Christian lifestyle is not separately available. It exists only in Christ as the expression of the divine life that he bestowed. (cf. Van de Beek 2014b:55)

He is, however, not totally against the church's involvement in the community. Van de Beek (2007) explains:

... a call for traditions is a call for convictions, this can only be successful if we accept traditions, languages, customs, and religions, this society will not only be rich because of its beautiful, multicolored composition, nor only because people of all cultures contribute to economic prosperity, but even more because people will have standards and values as they are embedded in a community that is rooted in a tradition. It is especially rich because in such a society people can feel really free: at home — even if they are foreigners on earth as Christians are. For in such a society, even foreigners can feel at home without losing their identity. (p. 194)

Van de Beek (2020c:190) is more radical than those public theologians who regard the regeneration of this world as the way in which the kingdom of God will come. He views the engagement with the present world as prophetic theology that should be eschatologically linked to the cross of Jesus. The believer is of a new dispensation. Accordingly, Van de Beek (2018b:151) writes on Christian life:

They do not only behave differently, they are different. They are eschatological new beings, living in Christ. Because they belong to Him, they belong to heaven. Consequently, they are strangers on earth. This is an elementary belief in early Christianity. (Heb 11:3; Pt 2 2:11)

In this regard, in the sense of a suffering world, he also suggests that pacifism is the correct way to understand the life of a Christian. Christians may never kill. A Christian can never, even if he is a judge, apply the death penalty to a person. A person must not be killed, not even in war. He opines that, before Constantine, the early church Fathers also held the view of pacifism (Van de Beek 2020a:77–99). (cf. explanation in Verster 2020:56ff.).

Eschatology is the total regeneration of this world in Christ. Christ is the eschatology. The reality of heaven and hell must not be rejected. The new life is possible in Christ. The new world is possible in Christ (Van de Beek 2008a:13ff.).

Engaging Van de Beek

There can be no doubt that one should regard Van de Beek's most essential theological position, namely that the God of the cross is *One*, very highly. Paul emphasises that he only wants to know about the Crucified Christ. In this world, we see the cross. There is no other way to talk about God's love except by the cross (cf. Verster 2020:178). The resurrection as eschatological event confirms the cross.

An essential text in this regard is 1 Corinthians 2:1–5:

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. [a] 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

In this regard, it is also appropriate to refer to how the New Testament scholar DeSilva (2004:567) explains that Paul refers to the implications of the 'mystery of the cross and the abundance of God's generosity' as essential. One may thus accept Van de Beek's premises.

Van den Brink (2019:323) views the emphasis on the cross as monotonous, although there is a pastoral emphasis. His view must be challenged. One can only refer to Paul as above. The only way to engage this horrific world is by way of the cross. The resurrection shows a way out, but it is an eschatological truth. In this world, we experience the light

shining through as in a dark room, but we still have to live in the darkness until the consummation in God. Agreeing with Van de Beek, the resurrection confirms the cross. One must accept his view in the light of the confirmation of God's revelation in the cross. There we meet God. Only in the cross can we have any new relation with God. However, the *One* on the cross is also the resurrected *One* and he gives hope.

Peels (2013:227–228) emphasises important aspects. He is of the opinion that Van de Beek changes the roles of the atonement so that God also becomes a victim by being part of the massive turn in this world. Christ participates in the sin of the world and belongs to the sinners of this world. Peels rejects the view that Christ himself becomes guilty. He states that Scriptural evidence in this regard is not available. Peels argues that one cannot prove, on a metaphysical level, that one is guilty by the guilt of another and become a perpetrator and a defeater. Lastly, he is of the opinion that Van de Beek does not fully support the age-old Christian confession that God is totally good and that there is no blemish in God. I understand Van de Beek in this way: God is good. God is good in his Son Jesus Christ on the cross. Here we see the goodness of God. It should be clear that this is how God, who is without blemish, enters the world. Christ is the total revelation of God. In him, we see the living God. He carries our burden on our behalf and calls us to join and follow him. Christ on the cross enters into our deepest struggles. There we find God.

Van den Brink (2012:7) also engages him:

As soon as we conflate creation and Fall, we move to a substantially different view of the nature of evil, giving it a metaphysical rather than a historical status. To be sure, in one way the metaphysical view takes evil more seriously. For if sin is a historically contingent rather than a metaphysically necessary phenomenon, it is not bound up with human nature and therefore we can in principle be liberated from it without losing our humanity. In fact, the gospel tells us that there has already been a person with a fully human nature who did not get contaminated by evil, and by whose saving work we can indeed be liberated from sin (p. 716)

This is an essential aspect that needs to be discussed. I do not think that Van de Beek in any way disregards the seriousness of evil or the fact that sin is a terrible reality. Again, he regards it totally in view of the cross. Christ is the answer to sin as the *One* without sin who died on the cross. One must, however, be cautious not to accept sin and evil as part and parcel of God's creation. The creation remains good, but God's judgement on sin is a reality. Christ enters into this world to become the *One* in this world. The question whether evil is part of the creation should receive serious attention and one must challenge views accepting evil as part of God's good creation.

Vorster (2018) writes on the church and the kingdom:

Van de Beek views the church as an eschatological community. He makes a distinction between the church and eschatology. In his view, the church and the Kingdom are identical. This view nullifies the present reality of the Kingdom. (p. 5)

Reitsma (2009:355) regards Van de Beek's view that the kingdom is so radical that it has nothing to do with this world. In a sense, evil is then also rid of its terrible aspects because God has created this world so that it can die, because the kingdom is born through death. Koopman (2014:61) sees in his theology a protest against the evil and suffering of this world.

One can hardly be optimistic about this present world in sin, but one should look beyond the suffering to the eschatological resurrection. This opens the possibility of hope even in this world. In this regard, more emphasis on the resurrection as *confirmation of the cross* is needed. Although one must challenge the emphasis of some exponents of public theology when it wants to regard this sinful world to be regenerated from within, it is still necessary to proclaim that God is essentially involved in this world and that every inch of it should come under God's rule (Kuyper). In this regard one must ask if Van de Beek gives enough room for the confession that the kingdom of God should be realised on all aspects of present life.

Smit (2017:79ff.) explains that public theology is complex, contested, and often has a prophetic quality. The question remains: Can the church be prophetic when it faces so many challenges herself? To Smit (2017), public theology should show a certain profile:

This is after all the heart of the conviction that public theology should show a biblical-theological profile - it should speak about what is at stake. This is also the point of the argument that it should be public - public theology should be about what counts in public life, about what makes a difference, about what affects human beings and the created world, about what matters to real people in real life. (p. 88)

Regarding public theology, it is important to note that, although there are many instances where some aspects of this theology tried to bring the kingdom of God into this sinful world, it led to very serious challenges of Christian theology and these theologies often caused much suffering. Laubscher (2021:59) concludes that intensive interaction with public and/or prophetic theology is necessary and that it is acceptable to continuously engage in it. After evaluating Barth's contribution, Laubscher (2021:90) concludes that, throughout Barth's theology, there is a deep and unavoidable ethical sense that is still needed. The question is: How does Van de Beek relate his theology to the view of public theology and ethics? It is clear that he regards this again considering the cross. Ethics must be viewed as the light of the *One* who died on the cross. It is not true that he has no view on ethics for the world, but he always relates it to Christ of the cross. He is totally committed to the world, because God takes responsibility for the world. Den Hertog (2014:184) writes: 'Van de Beek et al. express a theological pessimism, where the Hauerwas promoters burden the church with a heavy social mission. Van de Beek has no ethical program whatsoever'. Although Van de Beek has a pessimistic view of the sinful world, in Christ one should engage with it in an ethical way. Van de Beek is clear that Christ of the cross is

present in the world. It would be a pessimistic view if one regards the world as being beyond all redemption, because God is present in Christ on the cross, even in this terrible world.

Van de Beek engages Welker regarding the Spirit. Welker regards the Spirit as God's Spirit of total regeneration. Although present in the church, the Spirit works comprehensively in God's creation, which Welker (1991) understands as follows:

The creation accounts of Genesis make us sensitive to relations of interdependence among creatures. They also make us sensitive to relations of power and 'transcendence' among creatures. At the same time, they lead us to direct more interesting and instructive questions to God and God's creative action than those which were fixated on the indeterminate power of production, causation, and dependence. These more interesting questions concern themselves with the divine intentions and goals in the construction and maintenance of associations of interdependent relations among creatures. (p. 68)

Van der Westhuizen (2022:42) is of the opinion that Welker also accepts that the Spirit engages more comprehensively in the church and people. The Word and the Spirit have a mutual relation. Pluralism in a society consists of communities in entities relating to one another. In this regard, the Spirit enhances relations (2022:58).

Van der Westhuizen writes (2022):

In this way Welker also highlights the importance of diverse humanity, of humanity in their diversity. In the face of God, in the presence of God in and through the Spirit, human beings are able to recognise who they are, also recognise their worth. Through this recognition of their worth, of their worth from others, and of the worth of others, relations are renewed. (p. 121)

Van de Beek places much more emphasis on the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ in the church. One may view the difference between them as not so radical if one also considers that Van de Beek accepts that the Spirit is also present in creation as the Spirit of Christ. It is also important to note, as with the aspect of the Spirit working in the world, that we have to understand that a new world can only come about if we confess Christ as we enter into life. One has to say that all in this world is not lost, because one also has to challenge it, in the sense of bringing about the newness of the new relation of God and explaining the new relation of God by confessing the fullness of Christ in God as well as the wonders of God's redemption.

It must be emphasised that the Holy Spirit is the one Spirit of Christ. The Spirit emphasises the fact that we are in Christ and that the church should be understood from this emphasis in Christ as *One* with God. One should also understand that God does not heal this sinful and secular world totally. However, God is still the God who reigns over good and evil. Through his Holy Spirit he brings about light even in this sinful world. Therefore, although one has to understand that the work of the Spirit is always from Christ, honouring

Christ and working in the church, it also implies that it can be emphasised as the work of God. Van der Kooi (2018:9) differs from Van de Beek in that he believes that the Spirit is finished speaking because the salvation history is complete at the resurrection of Jesus. The rest is completion. Van de Kooi regards the work of the Spirit as continuous. Dekker (2018:342) explains that Van de Beek is of the opinion that this world is obsolete and that a new world is only possible in the resurrection of Christ; a total new world, not something here and now in a new humane world. In this regard the cross is essential. For Dekker, Van de Beek's views are too one-sided. It is important to regard Van de Beek's view of the Spirit in the light of the presence of the Spirit in the church. The Spirit always enters the world through the church. One can be critical concerning this emphasis, as the Spirit also regenerates the world.

Van den Brom (2004:504) refers to the fact that Van de Beek rejects enlightenment theology: 'He rejects enlightenment theology with its use of critical philosophy because of the proposition that Christian faith is totally different from'. Van den Brom (1999:190) understands Van de Beek's theology as Alexandrian, namely Christ from above. While Kuitert regards Jesus from below, Jesus as an apposition to God, Van de Beek regards this God, Jesus Christ, as the true revelation. One should indeed accept Van de Beek's view, because God is revealed in Christ (Phlp 2 and Col 1).

The unity of God and Christ should be honoured. Van de Beek's views can, however, be challenged, should this unity of God be extrapolated to the unity of the church. The totally divided church in this world, in its structures, would be a rejection of the confession of the one God, if this is so. The unity of the church is primarily found in the one faith in Jesus Christ. Van de Beek, however, rejects the notion of spiritual unity. For him, this is opting out. Calling for unity under the primacy of the Pope, as he suggests, does not take the deep theological differences into account. Although the disunity of the church is reason for serious distress and confession of sin, it is a reality and the only way to confess the one church is by believing the unity in the one faith in Christ. Calling for structural unity is, however, a given from this perspective. One may never accept the deep divisions in the church. Unity must be sought from the unity in faith. One must, however, be careful to regard the unity of the church in the light of the unity of God.

One must also challenge Van de Beek's views on pacifism. The post-Constantinian fathers were also accepted as fathers of the church. They understood that, in different situations, one can be called upon as Christian to defend the people's living and their right to exist in this broken world. In this broken world, one cannot sit back and accept that unbelievers must defend one's right, but one must also be prepared to defend the rights of other people. In some instances, in the history of the world, it would be disastrous if some dictatorships were not stopped by people who offer themselves up to stop dictators such as Hitler and Putin, and help bring about peace in the world.

This is a final radical decision with great sorrow, but necessary as last resort in this terrible world.

Regarding eschatology, it is important to note that one must agree with Van de Beek (2008a:262–263) that the total new world is only possible when God changes this world and brings about a total new dispensation in Christ. Only when God, in his essence, changes this world in Christ to a new world, can there be a new world (Van de Beek 2008a:166). This world cannot come about by evolutionary newness of what is happening here. This world will totally change, and God will effect this. That being the case, Van de Beek is correct when he mentions that this world is not our final abode; we are not of this world. We are living in a different world. We are living for a different King.

Conclusion

Van de Beek's theology is a deep encounter with the most essential aspects of theology. It is appropriate to engage with him with great theological respect. The emphasis on Jesus Christ of the cross is highly acceptable. This aspect can never be overemphasised. This is the only kind of theology that has implications for the sinner and that regards salvation in every respect. The love of God is only visible in the cross. The emphasis that God is *One* is extremely relevant. The divinity of Christ is thus accepted. The importance of the church and how the Spirit is present in the church cannot be underestimated. The horrific world needs these emphases.

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