

FOREWORD

The position of theology at a public and secular university has become a contested issue in recent years. In a country like South Africa, with a multi-religious population and a secular constitution, Christian theology should account increasingly for its legitimacy among the other academic disciplines. During a strategic planning process, the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Free State opted intentionally to expand its mission and focus on not only the church as public, but also society and the academy. Initiating and stimulating interdisciplinary conversation on the campus is considered one aspect of such an expansion.

An international conference with the theme *Faith, Religion and the Public University* was hosted during March 2010. An array of scholars from abroad and universities in South Africa, representing disciplines like law, philosophy, physics, sociology and theology, participated in the conversation. The articles in this edition of *Acta Theologica* are a selection of these presentations and convey a sense of the crucial role of faith and religion in the public and intellectual spheres. It is hoped that these reflections may lead to further discussion and advance the constructive role of theology at universities.

Having cautioned about the legal and political implications of terminological “looseness”, **Iain Benson** pleads for a more diverse public sphere. By inflating its own role, the law must not put added pressures on the liberty that accommodation and subsidiarity require. **Gerrit Brand** courageously enters the fray about theology at a public university and argues for the legitimacy of confessional theology, exposing the myth of a neutral public space. According to **Shaun de Freitas**, a legal scholar, the discussion on faith, religion and the university can be optimized on a pluralist platform for communication. Differing forms of communication are required to discuss the purpose of higher education. **Christo Lombard** explores the various positions of religion at a university, indicating the kinds of relevance demanded of theology. **Anne-mie Patyn** and her colleagues discuss the difficulties and opportunities of the course “Perspectives on Religion and Meaning” at the Catholic University (Leuven). Faith and religion should be exposed to public academic scrutiny to ensure that it does not become a private and dangerous matter. **Isabel Phiri** and **Sarojini Nadar** refer to the Feminist notion that the personal is political to argue that removing religion from the university will only cause an increase in fundamentalism. **Wentzel van Huyssteen**, from Princeton, proposes a revision of public theology as interdisciplinary theology, pointing out how, for example, theology and paleoanthropology could converge. Since prehistory, symbolic behaviour in Homo sapiens has always included religious awareness. Philosopher **Anton van Niekerk** highlights the rational and metaphorical nature of theology and its legitimate place at the university by discussing

the radical hermeneutic character of all theological knowledge. Contemporary discourses on transcendence are treated by **Daniël Veldsman**. He argues for the relocation of reflection on transcendence, suggesting the pursuit of an interdisciplinary understanding. **Pieter Verster** points to the current discussions on Missiology and its embattled position at a university. The way it is taught, as a ministry of reconciliation, is finally decisive for its future.

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