



BRILL

## Editorial: Voice

So often in the evolution of a public theology the focus has fallen upon a concern for audience. Martin Marty's initial concern for a public church was due to the risk of faith being essentially conceived in private terms and the evident retreat of the (ecumenical) church away from speaking its mind into matters of public importance. In a variation on that type of theme David Ford defined theology's 'ecology of responsibility' as the discipline's vocation to engage with the three-fold audience of the church, the academy and the public domain. That familiar naming of the three realms of the theological discourse clearly resonates with the foundational work of David Tracy. The way in which those audiences are then imagined and put into practice is not necessarily the same from one geographical and cultural location to another: the merits of this attention being given to audience stands, nevertheless.

In some ways this talk of audience is only one part of an equation. It assumes a speaker and concentrates upon who is doing the hearing, the listening, the 'auditing' and where the recipient of this speech might be located. It is that prior assumption that deserves more attention than it often receives. Who is speaking, writing, proclaiming? Whose voice—and, by extension, whose issues and insights—is being privileged? To those questions can be added those do with what kind of mood or tone is being employed. The frequent invocation of the need to be bilingual and interdisciplinary lends itself to that which is reasonable, civil, respectful, and intelligible. But must that always be the case? These matters to do with voice, mood and tone permeate this edition of the *International Journal of Public Theology*.

Jakub Urbaniak, Cas Wepener and Hendrik Pieterse provide the anger. They do so for a reason. They are all writing out of the experience of post-apartheid South Africa and the failure to realize the civic promise of the rainbow nation. Urbaniak takes exception to what he describes as the standard way of doing a public theology that has emerged in South Africa. Urbaniak writes as a self-confessed outsider and makes the case for more room being given to dissenting and black African voices. He especially focuses on a selection of Nico Koopman's writings. It is very difficult, of course, to do full justice to the corpus of another's writings. There can be shifts of emphasis over time in a period of rapid change. The benefit of Urbaniak's work as an 'angry theologian' is that he demonstrates how highly differentiated is the nature of a public theology

while he is also raising questions as to whose interests it is being performed. Talk of the common good, the flourishing of all and a civil society can mask a raft of different aims and aspirations. Urbaniak himself writes out of a passion for liberation. In a subsequent edition an article by Koopman will be published in a context where the vision of democracy seems to have been forgotten.

Wepener and Pieterse address matters of voice in a very different manner. At face value their interest in how anger functions in the act of preaching may seem like a retreat into the institutional life of the church and a retreat from the public domain of Marty, Ford and Tracy. That judgement would ignore the way in which the bilingual nature of a public theology expects issues that are matters of the moment in society at large should be interpreted back into the life of the church. Wepener and Pieterse situate the sermons under consideration into a public context of rising anger, the Fallism movement and articles in the media.

This concern for voice is clearly present in Marco Derks' enquiry into Dutch discourses on homosexuality. His analysis is premised on the case Esther McIntosh has made that draws attention to the relative absence of voices to do with gender and sexuality. It is itself a reminder of Michael Warner's thesis (drawing upon on the work of Nancy Fraser) on the need for the recognition of counterpublics. For Derks the subject matter of homosexuality turns attention to 'regimes of the self': that turn might then be seen by others as a private, personal matter of identity. It is evident, though, that discussion on sexual identity is fast becoming a global flow, even in cultures that do not talk openly about such. Derks pays close attention to the rhetoric that is to be found in the public discussion on homosexuality and how those who are gay are then represented.

The present point in time is seeing the emergence of many voices from diverse regions of the world. Writing out of South Korea Sungho Choi addresses the theme of climate change and the politics of mitigation. What is of particular interest is the contributing theological tradition out of which Choi is writing. Whereas Urbaniak is inclined towards a liberation theology Choi is grounded in a more conservative, evangelical biblical theology. That this should be so is evidence of how the contemporary interest in the public attracts attention right across the theological spectrum.

Choi provides a conduit for two other writers whose work draws out the increasing level of interest in the intersection of a world Christianity and a public theology / religion. For David Thang Moe the context is suffering at the hands of the military regime in Myanmar. There is an urgent need for further work in this territory, especially in the light of the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims. Moe's focus is on how a political theology can serve a public purpose in the interests of an 'embracive community' that offers justice, peace