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Reconstructing the history of doing theology at UWC – Some fragmentary decolonial perspectives

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Abstract

The history of the University of the Western Cape is a history born amidst colonisation but also one of decolonisation and the emergence of decolonial thinking. This contribution sketches these movements from a point of departure in a private letter from the then Prime Minister H. F. Verwoerd to Prof Kalie Heese (Psychology) on the future of the then University College of the Western Cape (dated 2 October 1962). This will, in rather graphic terms, illustrate the challenges posed to tertiary education under conditions of colonial rule. Against that background, subsequent sections explore the history of UWC and of doing theology at UWC from one possible, fragmentary decolonial perspective. In a subsequent article, the significance of these developments for reconstructing the history of systematic theology in particular will be explored.

Keywords

Belhar Confession; decoloniality; K. W. Heese; Systematic Theology; theological education; H. F. Verwoerd; University of the Western Cape

Introduction

The history of the University of the Western Cape is a history born amidst colonisation but also one of decolonisation and the emergence of decolonial thinking. UWC was established in 1960 as a university college in terms of the apartheid government's policy of separate development and on the basis of race classification. Ironically, the university was established just at the time when Harold MacMillan delivered his "Winds of Change" speech in Cape Town on 3 February 1960. The founders of the university were in

for a surprise: the wind was not blowing "North" or "West" (bringing rain to the Cape) but "South" and perhaps "East" (summer winds).

In this contribution, I will sketch these developments from a point of departure in a private letter from the then Prime Minister H. F. Verwoerd to Prof Kalie Heese (Psychology) on the future of the then University College of the Western Cape (dated 2 October 1962). This will illustrate in rather graphic terms the challenges posed to the establishment of tertiary institutions under conditions of settler colonialism.

Against that background I will then in subsequent sections note how the term "decolonial" will be used here, explore the history of UWC and of the study of theology at UWC, offering one possible decolonial perspective, one that would need to be complemented, corrected, and challenged by colleagues, alumni, and students. Such a history is necessarily fragmented, partial, incomplete, and plagued by plurality and ambiguity, possibly by radical and systematic distortions. The addition of the word "fragmentary" in the title is therefore telling and follows from a departmental seminar where an earlier version of this contribution was discussed. Given my position as staff member (with the privileges and position of power that this brings) I am able to gather some of these fragments in the hope that others would be able to add other fragments and re-arrange them where need be from other perspectives.[1] I am grateful to current and former staff members who shared insights and supporting documents that helped to reconstruct the story that is offered here.[2]

The obvious needS to be stated, namely that the story of doing theology at UWC cannot be understood in isolation from other theological institutions in the region, notably the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University (SU) and the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town, but also Huguenot College and Helderberg College. The same applies to other institutions offering programmes in theology in South Africa and

1 For this emphasis on fragments (as opposed to hegemony), fragmentation (or "frag-events") and gathering the fragments, see David Tracy's recent *Fragments* (2020), drawing especially on Walter Benjamin. I remain indebted to his oeuvre since my doctoral studies on Tracy (Conradie 1992).

2 Reconstructing this story would not have been possible without the help of several colleagues, (thus far) including Daan Cloete, Jaap Durand, Hans Engdahl, Pieter Grove, Christo Lombard, Jannie Malan and Dirkie Smit and librarians such as Thozama Bici.

elsewhere in the world, especially in the Netherlands. This may be true in general but at UWC this is particularly relevant given a) the movement of students from one institution to another; b) the movement of staff and alumni from one institution to another, c) that several UWC staff members studied at SU (including myself); d) that several former UWC students became staff members at SU (Kalie August, Russel Botman, Nico Koopman, Sipho Mahokoto, Elna Mouton, Mary Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel, Robert Vosloo); e) that scholars often move from one theological sub-discipline to another; and especially f) the (for many traumatic) transition in 2000 when the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa moved its theological training from UWC to SU.

For the sake of some demarcation I will focus on contributions by students and staff members while they were at UWC, except in cases where they reflect on their time at UWC. This would have to do even though such demarcation is far from precise.

It runs in the extended family

Kalie Heese (1910–1974) was approached (probably in the derogatory search for "Kleurlingkenners") by Kobus Meiring, the first UWC Rector, to become one of its first academic appointees and received a letter of appointment dated 15 December 1959. Heese was at that time a pastor in the Dutch Reformed congregation of Pinelands. He was a remarkable and colourful figure, much beloved by his family, young people and according to all accounts also by UWC students. He was completely deaf from adolescence onwards but could lip read very well and on that basis could fulfil his duties as lecturer. He and some of his family members were deeply involved in the Voortrekkers, a youth organization for Afrikaners. He had good connections in Afrikaner circles, was a colleague of Verwoerd at Stellenbosch University in the 1930s but was an independent minded scholar and not a member of the Afrikaner Broederbond (despite several approaches), since he resisted its secrecy.

In 1958 a storm ensued around him when the Dutch Reformed congregation in Pinelands, where he served as a pastor, invited Rev Willem Xaluva to preach during a Sunday evening service. Xaluva was the first "Black"

moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa and was based nearby in Langa. He was allowed to preach from the pulpit to a packed audience, including many journalists. Afterwards, Heese received numerous hate messages from far and wide and a phone call from Dr Verwoerd chiding him (from above) over his "indiscretion".[3] He simply responded by saying that this was a decision of the local church council (from below).

For the sake of disclosure: Kalie Heese's granddaughter, Esther Marié Pauw, became my wife in 1991. After the death of Kalie Heese's wife, Hester Heese (1911–1992),[4] a beloved author of children's books in Afrikaans, I obtained some of his correspondence with UWC – which provides the sources from which I draw here. Such an extended family network qualifies (and perhaps disqualifies) the "decolonial" perspective that I am able to offer here.

Letters from HF Verwoerd to Kalie Heese: A case study in coloniality

There are especially two letters that are noteworthy:

A letter from the office of the Prime Minister, signed by H. F. Verwoerd and dated 14 September 1960, is addressed to his "honourable friend" Kalie Heese. It acknowledges receipt of a letter containing well wishes for Verwoerd on his birthday (on 9 September) that was evidently signed by several UWC colleagues, including Profs. Meiring and Heese. Verwoerd appreciated the "encouraging words" and "assurance of prayers" for the Verwoerds. He trusts that the duties done at UWC in service of "our people" ("ons Volk" – with a capital) will be crowned with "rich blessings". Why on earth UWC colleagues would feel obliged to send such a message eludes me but there may have been some strategic motivations in this regard, e.g., to enhance relationships with the Prime Minister's office following the earlier

3 The information gathered here is derived from conversations with my in-laws, namely Kalie Heese's daughter Ilse Heese and her husband Martin Pauw (Professor in Missiology, SU, 1983-2000). Martin Pauw comes from a missionary background in Zambia stretching over three generations. His great-grandfather was J. C. Pauw who was (grudgingly) involved in the controversial establishment of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1881, served as its moderator four times and taught as a part-time lecturer at the Mission Institute in Wellington (see Philander 2019:101).

4 As a remarkable aside, according to stories often repeated in her family, Hester Heese remained on tea-drinking terms with Betsie Verwoerd. After Hendrik Verwoerd's death, Betsie Verwoerd allegedly told Hester Heese that her husband, just before his death, developed some serious reservations about the feasibility of the Bantustan policy. The veracity of such a belated presumed change of mind would be hard to establish.

conflict between Heese and Verwoerd and the assassination attempt on Verwoerd by David Pratt on 9 April 1960. The original letter from Heese to Verwoerd is probably lost.

A far more important letter, again from the office of the Prime Minister, signed by H. F. Verwoerd was dated 2 October 1962. This clearly followed a personal letter from Kalie Heese in which the latter argued that for the then University College of the Western Cape (UCWC) to come to fruition it needs to gain full university status and thus independence from Unisa (which came to fruition only in 1970). Again the original is probably lost, but the remarkable reply from Verwoerd clearly articulates the apartheid ideology as far as tertiary education is concerned. It is a case study in how half-truths soon become completely distorted and no longer visible to the author. There are also some bitter ironies that emerged in hindsight that readers need to explore for themselves. It may be worthwhile to offer a translation of the whole letter, without altering Verwoerd's lengthy sentences or rhetoric:

> Dear friend
>
> I received your letter of 24 September 1962 and took notice of your communications with interest.
>
> The problems that emerged there, especially as a result of the inferior level of the students, is of course not surprising. We will have to undergo the same misère with the Bantu until a better school education yields fruit from the bottom up. The moment when such population groups [kleurgroepe] get their own teachers and more children go to school – not only the brightest – as they desire and we grant them because that is also what we desire, the quality will deteriorate until the teachers themselves improve. The University College will have to work with such material in the interim. This is one of the sacrifices and challenges – almost like a teacher for backward children – and one should not become despondent as a result.
>
> The work will be rewarded not through the quantity of one's throughput, but through the success of the few. Those few will become the coloured people's [bruin mense] future leaders. The

success of the College and all the lecturers there together will one day be tested not only by whether such future leaders will have been given the necessary knowledge, but also whether they have the necessary insight and enthusiasm for the separate development of their own people. If they only become abler agitators against everything in which we believe and wish to do for them, then there is real failure – and this will wreak itself on our life as a people and in future also on the coloured people. The test for one's work there is not purely academic, that is, whether one provides a sufficient quality of education at various levels, but a much more significant one, namely whether people and leaders are formed that can fit in with the plan of how a healthy and prosperous future can be built for the white man, the coloured man and the black man alongside each other – and whether we will be able to avoid the struggle and mistakes of the USA's education system.

Concerning your other, greater problem, namely that you as lecturers find it frustrating to be so curtailed by the fact that the College forms part of the University of South Africa and that the latter prescribes limiting duties for the former, just the following:

The main attack that we should have expected and received on the establishment of separate university education for Bantu, Coloureds and Indians was that this will provide inferior education. The essential response lies in the quality of lecturers although this can only become evident later. The immediate and visible response was that the level would be as high as the other Universities because the colleges would fall under the Examining University of South Africa, on whose Council all the Lecturing Universities of our country are represented. This position would be similar to that of Stellenbosch and all our present Universities in former days when they too were colleges of a country-wide examining University. The lecturers of our Bantu Universities, as long as they are Whites, will find it as curtailing as the lecturers at our own White Colleges in those days. However, we should guard against becoming too hasty to depart from that system. Firstly, we must remember that Stellenbosch and the others also had to develop for years before they were ripe for independence. In modern times the process may

> be faster, but still time will be required to find one's feet. Secondly, it must be remembered that the primary aim is that non-Whites will take over as lecturers, as and when they become available, and the question is whether they can carry the responsibility for standards, syllabi, and so forth so quickly. Thirdly, we must first survive [doodleef] the attacks on educational levels before such institutions can become lecturing Universities. Fourthly it must be remembered that lecturers at the three Bantu Colleges and the one Indian college are mainly Whites and of the same standard as [those at] the Coloured college – and what is done for the one must also be done for the others, as well as for the successors. At this early stage of developments, numbers and problems, a transition towards full universities therefore cannot be considered for all, not only insofar as responsibility for courses and examinations is concerned.
>
> A case can perhaps be made for less strict prescriptions and limitations from above, from the University of South Africa. Of course I cannot go into this myself, nor can I attend to the other side, from Rector Pauw of the University of South Africa. I will, however, bring your letter and my response to the attention of Minister P.W. Botha, whose Department will become responsible for your institution, of Minister Maree from Bantu education and Indian affairs, and of Minister De Klerk of Education, asking them to consider the problem that emerges with dr. Pauw and to see whether there is not another solution for more contact between and more cooperation of all the lecturers at the daughter colleges that will yield more satisfaction. This is probably the best way in which I can elicit an investigation following your communication.
>
> Best greetings
>
> H.F. Verwoerd

Three very brief comments on this letter may suffice, besides the obvious resentment over white supremacy and white hegemony that it provokes:

First, this letter illustrates the challenges that UWC had to address from its inception given the far-reaching process of establishing tertiary institutions under conditions of settler colonialism – and therefore the need for

decolonial thinking regarding every single aspect of tertiary education: the university charter, relations with government, appointments, syllabi, modules, examination, not to forget about infrastructure and finances.

Second, the need to define and maintain standards of quality and excellence remains as prevalent and as contested now as it was then, at primary, secondary, Bachelors and postgraduate levels. Decoloniality demands that such standards of excellence cannot be borrowed from the North Atlantic, but such standards also cannot merely be self-defined – or else will lead to self-isolation and will then not be recognised elsewhere.

Third, it is haunting to see how Verwoerd envisages a form of affirmative action on the long term, albeit without doing away with race classification or a "University of White Control" (UWC). In short, this letter illustrates why addressing the challenge of decolonising tertiary education remains incomplete.

A very, very brief UWC history and the "decolonial turn"

The decolonial turn

The purpose of this contribution is not to first offer a theoretical overview of the conceptual distinctions between colonisation, coloniality, decolonisation, postcolonialism and the decolonial turn, and to then illustrate that with the history of (systematic) theology at UWC or to use that as a critical tool in reconstructing that history. Arguably, the history itself needs to take precedence so that decolonial perspectives may then follow from that through reflection on that story. This is because UWC has been a prime location where decolonial thinking emerged in the first place, at least in South Africa. This applies also to the history of systematic theology. The rise of Black consciousness, for example, clearly stimulated theological reflection but at UWC doing (Black) theology was also a crucial factor in the rise of Black consciousness amongst student leadership. The decolonial turn serves as one criterion for adequacy in theological reflection but is partly also the product of such theological reflection, stimulated by core theological themes (see below), at least insofar as UWC is concerned. Moreover, the term "decoloniality" emerged in theological reflection at UWC only in the last five years or so and has to be understood against the

background of extensive earlier theoretical engagements with apartheid itself in church and society (see already Durand 1970, several essays in Durand 1987, Adonis 1982, Botha 1984, Coetzee 2010) with societies in transition, with socio-economic development (see the many contributions edited by Koegelenberg), with economic justice (see Damon 1995, many contributions by Smit), with neoliberal globalisation (see Boesak & Hansen 2009, 2010, Lombard 2010, 2011, several essays in Smit 2007), with consumerist cultures (Conradie 2009, 2010), with a critique of Empire and now also with the so-called "Anthropocene" (Conradie 2020). Again, the story of such theoretical reflections has to take precedence over the latest available theories.

Others may offer a theoretical overview of the decolonial turn with more acumen, rigour, passion, and integrity than what I can offer. Suffice it to say that postcolonialism with its distinct French connection influences multiple academic disciplines at UWC. This is perhaps epitomised by the awarding of an honorary doctorate to Jacques Derrida in 1998. Likewise, decolonial thinking is deeply entrenched in UWC's history. Students embraced the vision of Steven Bantu Biko (see 2017) already in the 1970s while Frantz Fanon (see 2017) was often cited during and since the student protests of 2015 and 2016. The term decoloniality itself (if not the underlying thought patterns) was introduced by Aníbal Quijano in 1990 (see 2007) and the influence of Latin American thinkers such as Walter Mignolo (see 2007, 2011, also Mignolo & Walsh 2018) is increasing at UWC, for example through the current work of my colleague Teddy Sakupapa (e.g., 2018, also Conradie & Sakupapa 2018).

There is a huge corpus of literature on what it means to be an African university emerging from UWC, especially through its Centre for Humanities Research. This cannot and need not be reviewed here. One may say that a recognition of the impact of coloniality (as a mind-set, shorthand for the coloniality of power) is now everywhere, infiltrating all discourses, in the same way that gender, race, history, politics, economics, health, place and ecology function as transversals. One may add that there is a need to be vigilant regarding a morphing from Dutch modes of coloniality (given the early influence of the Afrikaner Broederbond well into the 1980s) towards British modes of coloniality (not least given the use of English for teaching and administration but also given changes in the staff profile).

UWC and the decolonial turn

There is also no need here to offer a brief history of UWC as an institution. What is truly remarkable is that the university does not find its sense of identity in its founding years (given that it was founded on the basis of race classification), or the defining moments in the history of struggle against apartheid, or in its significant role in the transition to democracy (especially regarding the South African constitution, also through the role of Jakes Gerwel), or in its outstanding academic achievements as a historically "black" institution since 2000 (see Bharuthram & Pokpas 2020). Each of these is important, but in a very tangible sense UWC has to find its identity in the future, in constructing a society that has never been from a point of departure in an unacceptable present, in making sense of the present in order to meet future challenges. The ambiguous title of the volume on UWC's history *Becoming UWC*, edited by Premesh Lalu and Noëleen Murray (2012) is therefore apt. Nevertheless, constructing the future is of course only possible on the basis of an acute historical consciousness, recognising the impact of imperial conquest, colonial rule and the social tensions that have prevailed ever since.

Apartheid was a particularly crude radicalisation of imperial and colonial rule that stretched over centuries with successive waves of Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French and British colonialism and of Afrikaner and British settler colonialism. UWC's establishment on the basis of race classification in 1960 at the height of apartheid thinking therefore stands in the sign of colonial rule. To address that required not only a complex process of decolonisation more or less in the first half of its history but also the sustained decolonial ways of thinking emerging in the second half of its history thus far.

One may observe that at UWC decolonial tendencies met with distinct challenges in each successive decade:

At first it had to address perceptions of inferior quality from its own students who would have preferred to study at the University of Cape Town or Stellenbosch and referred in derogatory terms to the UWC as "bush".[5] A

5 See the recollections by Daan Cloete (2019) from the perspective of studying at UWC in the early 1960s.

next challenge was to overcome race classification for admission policies, thus challenging the very basis upon which the university was founded. As a result, the composition of the student population gradually changed with an increasing number of students classified under apartheid as "African", also with a slowly increasing number of "white" and international students. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the university and especially its students offered resistance against colonising powers on the outside (the apartheid regime) as well as the inside (Broederbond influence on the UWC Senate). By 1980 there was still a majority of "whites" amongst the academic staff. One may say in decolonial fashion that Jakes Gerwel's period as Rector and vice-Chancellor with the slogan of "the intellectual home of the left" may be regarded as an attempt not to be defined by one's adversaries in terms of an understanding of the very nature of the academy and pedagogy – albeit that the very term "left" remains co-determined by what is on the right.[6] The 1990s faced the challenge of managing the transition to a more democratic dispensation without merely copying or replacing the oppressors, while many of its staff accepted senior positions in government or at other universities. The first decade of the 21st century faced the challenge of defining appropriate standards of excellence for itself. In the many speeches of Brian O'Connell as Rector and Vice-Chancellor this required the recognition that Western assumptions about society (and university education) are not sustainable, while African institutions should guard against seeking to copy a model that is indeed unsustainable. The 2010s were arguably shaped by the emphasis on corporatization and internationalization in higher education and student resistance against the fee structures that such corporatization required. Such resistance was captured in slogans such as "Rhodes must fall" and "Fees must fall".

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6 Gerwel used this phrase during his inaugural speech as Rector in June 1987 during a state of emergency and political turmoil. It was entitled "The Ideological Context: Responding to the Democratic Left." Gerwel argued: "Every South African university has a dominant ideological orientation which describes the context of its operations … The one ideological formation under-represented or not at all represented in a similar way within the South African university community is that of the more radical Left. With the South African Left one is collectively referring to those people and institutions seeking and working for a more fundamental transformation of the old settler-colonial dominated order which is the present South Africa. The major thrust is towards a non-racial and majoritarian democracy, reflecting itself not in the mere form of multi-racial political arrangements but more fundamentally in the social re-organization of power and privilege." See Gerwel (1990).

The 2020s are far from clear as yet but are likely to pose the challenge of rethinking what residential universities entail in Africa (following the Oxford and Cambridge ideal?) as compared to distance learning institutions. New forms of colonialism, also in terms of internet access, not least in the context of Chinese and Indian (thus BRICS) relationships, may also require some vigilance.

In my assessment, UWC is the product of the interaction between various stakeholders (government, senior management, students, Council, Senate, academic staff, administrative staff, support staff, alumni, parents, donors, the media). These stakeholders have often conflicting if shifting interests but, after some initial resistance, each developed a common commitment that the institution would flourish. There have been times when each of these interest groups have tried to dominate the interaction and, in the process, overplayed their hand with devastating consequences – only for some balance of power to return given the shared commitment. The identity of the university cannot be claimed by any one of these interest groups and certainly not by any population group, precisely given the resistance against its original charter. It certainly cannot be restricted to a Khoi or so-called "Coloured" identity (the proverbial elephant in the room) and any attempts to capture such an identity will always be controversial and contested.[7] Umbrella terms such as "Black" or "African" at times play a crucial polemic role but can also be used to marginalise minorities. Any such a notion of identity has to be socially constructed given the interplay between the various interest groups. If the social experiment in creating this blend of interest groups were to fail, then one of the best examples – anywhere in the world – of creating an inclusive future on the basis of academic excellence would have failed. The history of UWC therefore constitutes an extended

7 The controversies in this regard are illustrated by a conference entitled "Towards Histories of South African Intellectual Traditions: The Histories and Life Trajectories of Coloured / "Coloured" / coloured Intellectuals" tellingly hosted by the Beyers Naudé Centre in Stellenbosch, 30 November – 1 December 2012. As far as I know the proceedings from his conference have not been published. I am grateful to Dirkie Smit for sharing with me this unpublished paper (Smit 2012) at this conferences, with ample warnings on the controversial nature of the topic. As Anne-Marie Cloete (1999) argued in her Magister thesis, if anything, "Coloured" identity is characterised by an "inbetweenness").

social experiment in creating a kind of society that has never been. The institution is therefore precious, to all others concerned.

Studying theology at UWC: A brief institutional history

Establishing and building institutions for marginalised groups under conditions of settler colonialism necessarily implies making compromises with colonial rule but also entails resistance to such rule. The institutional history of studying theology at UWC is a case study in this regard.

The period until 1999

The history of studying theology at UWC has to be understood against the background of the "Theological School" established in Wellington by the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church for training pastors from its own ranks ("eie seuns"). This followed some initial training since 1929, its formal establishment in 1943, the first class in 1946 and the appointment of the first full-time lecturer in Prof C. J. Kriel in 1957. In 1973 Kriel also became the acting UWC Rector. Before the University College of the Western Cape was established in 1960, the DRMC's Kuratorium approached its appointed rector in 1959 with a view to establish a Faculty of Theology at the institution. This suggestion was vehemently rejected by Prime Minister H. F. Verwoerd in 1961 on the grounds that one church cannot be advantaged over others (although the Theological Seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church in Stellenbosch became a Faculty of Theology at SU in 1963!). Nevertheless, already in 1961, a group of theology students registered at UCWC for preparatory studies towards theological training. In June 1964, the church obtained land adjacent to the UCWC and moved its theological training from Wellington to Bellville in 1965 with 4 lecturers and 17 students (see Botha 2000, Kriel 1969, Philander 2019:101–165, Robinson 2000).[8] The two adjacent tertiary institutions cooperated closely but remained independent at first.

In 1969 a number of churches explored the possibility of an ecumenical faculty of theology but only the DRMC approved this proposal and was

8 The lecturers at that time included J. L. de Villiers, C. J. Kriel, E. H. Holzapfel and A. C. van Wyk.

given a go-ahead to establish a Faculty of Theology that came to fruition in 1973. It had a clearly Reformed orientation with five departments, namely in Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, Dogmatics and Practical Theology, while a sixth in Missiology was added in 1975 (see Kriel 1978[9]).[10] The structure where a formative training in the Arts (including Greek and Hebrew) preceded a four-year training in theology was replaced in 1981 with an integrated curriculum where a four-year Bachelors of Theology was followed by a two year B.Th. Honours. The first year included an introduction to the theological encyclopaedia while the focus of later years was on doctrinal and practical subjects.[11] The traditional "encyclopaedic" approach to Christian theology was therefore maintained (see Robinson 2000).

In the interim "Biblical studies" was introduced as a "study direction" in Psychology (!) by Kalie Heese in 1971. This was taught by various lecturers, also from the Theological School, until a Department of Biblical Studies was established in the Faculty of Arts in 1974 with Pieter Smith and Jannie Malan as the first lecturers.[12] At the time it had 224 registered students out of a total UWC student population of 1535. This later became the Department of Biblical and Religious Studies with compulsory sections in OT, NT, hermeneutics, ethics and religious studies and growing student numbers.[13]

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9 Kriel's jubilee version of the history, *Seuns in sy Wingerd* (1978), enjoyed a controversial reception in the Faculty at that time.

10 The lecturers at that time included J. J. F. Durand (since 1973), P. J. J. S. Els (since 1973), E. H. Holzapfel, C. J. Kriel, B. C. Lategan (who replaced J. L. de Villiers) and P. J. Robinson (a new appointment in Missiology since 1975). Notably all were "White" men!

11 The lecturers at that time included Chris Botha (who was later replaced by Hannes Adonis), Daan Cloete (in the place of Bernard Lategan), Jaap Durand (seconded as vice-rector by 1981), Pieter Els, Gustav Bam (in the place of Ernst Holzapfel), Phil Robinson, and Dirkie Smit (appointed from 1981).

12 The permanent staff included, in order of first appointment, Pieter Smith (1972), Jannie Malan (1973), Jan Basson (1974), Christo Lombard (1976), Chris Greyling (1977), August Goliath (1978), Jerome Cornelissen (1980), Johan Retief (1981), Andrew Phillips (1984), Richard Stevens (1985) and Douglas Lawrie (1989). Notably all men! My gratitude to Jannie Malan for providing this information in an unpublished document entitled "Biblical Studies at UWC from 1971 to 1991", dated 11 March 1991.

13 According to meticulous figures provided by Jannie Malan, there were 1061 students registered for modules in the department in 1980 – which constituted no less than 25.5% of the UWC student population of 4153 at that time. In 1988 there were 1353 students registered for modules in the department, which constituted 12.8% of the

By 1985 a number of students from denominations other than the then DRMC registered at UWC. Such students were dissatisfied with the six-year training as their churches only required a three or four-year training for ordination. A series of meetings were held to explore a four-year training alongside the six-year training for DRMC students. Eventually the Apostolic Faith Mission and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa signed contracts with the University. As a result, a four-year curriculum (B) was introduced alongside the six-year curriculum (A) in 1987. This led to considerable duplication in terms of teaching and also complaints among students regarding the "inferiority" of Curriculum B. Nevertheless, the Faculty of Theology flourished in the 1980s and was one of the most influential and innovative forms of theological training in the country. The distinctive identity of the faculty at that time was the emergence of and reflection upon the declaration of a status confessionis (see Smit 1984a, 1984b, Durand 1984) and the subsequent Confession of Belhar (see especially the volume edited by Cloete & Smit 1984, also the edition of Apologia 2:2 in 1987).

Yet there was more to it than that. Dirkie Smit (2000) identifies five features in this regard: 1) the integrated nature of the curriculum, 2) the study of spirituality as an academic discipline,[14] 3) the focus on ecumenical studies, 4) the inclusion of charismatic and Pentecostal forms of training, and 5) the recognition of the thoroughly contextual nature of theological education. Smit observes that UWC was at the forefront of this emphasis on contextual relevance and that this followed from the demands of students who occupied leadership positions in student protests, but also from lecturers

total UWC student population of 10592. By 1991 such student number declined slightly to 1127. Malan (1991) claims that such student interest "was promoted by an honest, unbiased and contextually relevant studying of the Bible."

14 This focus on spirituality is especially evident in the teaching and writings of Denise Ackerman (e.g. 1994, 2000, 2009). See also the volume entitled *Claiming our Footprints: South African Women Reflect on Context, Identity and Spirituality*, edited by Ackermann and others, and the theses by Anne-Marie Cloete's Magister thesis (1999) on a spirituality of "inbetweenness" and by Collin Goeiman (1998) on a liberating spirituality. From the perspective of systematic theology see also Conradie (2006), Smit (1987, 1988, 1989, 1999). The Department of Religion and Theology has a postgraduate module on "Contextual Christian Spirituality" that is taught from time to time, often in collaboration with the Centre for Christian Spirituality.

such as Hannes Adonis[15] and Daan Cloete who studied in the Netherlands and joined the faculty in the early 1980s. Indeed, this was a crucial aspect of decolonising theological education and was already evident in the 1980s. Allan Boesak (1984) captured the underlying question by asking what it means to be Black and Reformed in the South African context (see also Boesak & Fourie 1998, Botman 1998).

In 1993 the university's senior management required the Faculty of Theology to address its top-heavy structure and duplication in the curricula, also given the existence of three related departments in Arts, namely Biblical and Religious Studies (with large undergraduate classes), Semitic Languages and Hellenistic Greek. The need for religious studies in a religiously plural context was also stressed. As a result, a new Faculty of Religion and Theology was established in 1995 with four departments, namely Biblical Studies and Languages, Christian Studies (including the history of Christianity, systematic theology, and Christian formation), Christianity and Society (including ethics, gender studies, community engagement and missiology) and Religious Studies. The curriculum was structured in the form of an integrated four-year Bachelors of Theology and a two year professional B.Th. Honours, while students registered for other degrees could also take the subjects on offer. The faculty had no less than 19 academic staff members and was amongst the strongest and most influential in the country at that time.[16]

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15 Especially two of the theses included in Adonis' doctoral defence (see 1982) are important for an early recognition of the need for decolonising theological education: Thesis 10: "The Decolonisation of church history writing is also in the South African context a matter of the highest priority" (with a reference to Verkuyl's *Inleiding in die Nieuwere Zendingwetenschap,* Kampen, 1975). Thesis 15: "If the three Black Dutch Reformed churches do not engage intensively with an own contextual theology now already, their pastoral and apostolic ministry will be irrelevant in the South African situation now and in future." (my translation). Adonis was appointed at UWC soon afterwards and was able to implement such statements in teaching and revising the curriculum – long before current demands to do so. My thanks to Dirkie Smit for pointing me to these theses and to Robert Vosloo for sending me a copy.

16 The academic staff members included Roger Arendse (on contract), Daan Cloete, Woldemar (Wollie) Cloete, John Daniels, Pieter Els, Leolyn Jackson, Douglas Lawrie and Nick Pretorius (all Biblical Studies and Languages), Hannes Adonis, Ernst Conradie, Robin Petersen, Andrew Phillips and Dirkie Smit (all Christian Studies), Denise Ackermann (the first woman to hold a permanent appointment), Willa Boesak (resigned in 1997), Robin Petersen and Phil Robinson (retired in 1995) (all Christianity

However, this dispensation proved to be short lived. After 1995 student numbers dropped drastically throughout the university, from around 15 000 in 1995 to 9000 in 1999. The reasons for that may be manifold but the discontinuation of scholarships for prospective teachers had a huge impact. By 1998 retrenchments amongst academic and administrative staff became "inevitable" to ensure financial sustainability. The Faculty of Religion and Theology was particularly hard-hit. Six of its remaining 15 lecturers were summarily retrenched, including both lecturers in Greek (Nick Pretorius and John Daniels) and the only church historian (Hannes Adonis). The subject library was closed and maintaining a faculty was no longer feasible, with Daan Cloete's lone voice arguing against that. In response, the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa terminated its contract with the University and moved its theological training (at least in the Western Cape) to Stellenbosch University (see the detailed account by Philander 2019:166–249, from the perspective of URCSA and especially the URCSA theological students). Two senior members of staff, namely Russel Botman (as acting Dean) and Dirkie Smit resigned on this basis in 1999.

From 2000 to the present

Contrary to widespread perceptions and (perhaps deliberate?) misunderstandings, studying theology at UWC was not terminated in 1999. Only one denomination, namely URCSA, albeit the one with the largest number of students, no longer officially recognised the training offered at UWC. With theological training at UWC nevertheless in jeopardy and with only a loose collection of students in theology from a wide variety of churches remaining, a few crucial decisions were taken in 1999 and implemented in 2000:

First, a Department of Religion and Theology was established in the Faculty of Arts, thus resisting any form of theological self-isolation. Decisions on curricula, examinations, research proposals, budgets, the library, and appointments had to be made together with colleagues from other departments in the faculty. The Department soon played a leading role in

and Society), and Manila Amin (on contract), Jerome Cornelissen and Farid Esack (resigned by 1997) (all Religious Studies).

that the committees for Higher Degrees, Academic Planning, Research and Examinations were chaired by colleagues in the Department at times.

Second, a three-year Bachelor of Theology was introduced while the four-year B.Th. was phased out. The curriculum was integrated on the basis of a hermeneutical understanding of theology with all modules termed "Theological Studies".[17] The orientation was deliberately "ecumenical" while theology students come from so-called mainline churches (mainly Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, a few Lutheran and AME postgraduates) and a wide variety of Pentecostal and stand-alone churches. This curriculum remained stable since 2000 with only a few minor changes.

Third, classes in Semitic Languages and Hellenistic Greek were terminated due to a lack of sufficient student interest.

Fourth, service courses were introduced in Ethics and in Hermeneutics (at first year level only) that became available to students registered for other degrees, including B.A., B.Psych. B.Com. and LL.B. By 2001 students could take Ethics as a major subject towards such degrees. The student numbers in Ethics gradually increased, with at one stage around 1200 undergraduate students registered. The curriculum focused on what is termed the "moral and religious foundations of society" and the formation of a human rights culture.[18] It found an always fluid middle way between (moral) philosophy, applied ethics, Christian ethics, and religious ethics. Modules that focus on religious studies are included in the curriculum but under the rubric of Ethics and not with a focus on any specific religious traditions (a strength of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town).

Fifth, a contract was signed between UWC and the then United Church of Zambia Theological College in 2000 that enhanced the numbers in theology by around 50 to 60 undergraduate students.

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17 A deceptively simple article by Dirkie Smit, aimed at first year Baptist students and published in *Apologia* in 1991, was influential and often prescribed because it acknowledged the integrated task of doing theology.

18 The terminology was proposed by Russel Botman on the basis of his doctoral thesis on discipleship and transformation (Botman 1994, also 2000). See also the volume edited by Botman and Sporre (2003).

Although the Department was weak and vulnerable in 2000 and had only four permanent staff members[19] by the end of 2003, following the secondment of Leolyn Jackson to the university administration, the retirements of Denise Ackermann (in 2000) and Daan Cloete (in 2003), it somehow survived and then began to flourish on the basis of these five decisions. The Department was fortunate to have the virtually full-time services of Hans Engdahl as extraordinary professor for several terms since 2005. Further developments include the following:

First, the Department hosted a series of more or less annual conferences, mainly aimed at pastors and faith-based organisations (FBOs). These included major international conferences on "African Christian Theologies in Transformation" (2003) and on "Ecclesiology and Ethics: The State of Ecumenical Theology in Africa" (2015).[20]

Second, the department registered four "research frameworks" in 2006 and expanded that to six in 2017 to coordinate and profile the research activities of staff, research fellows, alumni, and postgraduate students, namely on 1) Religion, Ethics and Social Transformation, 2) Religion and Gender, 3) Religion and Development, 4) Ecumenical Theology and Spirituality in Africa, 5) Christian eco-theology, and 6) Biblical Hermeneutics and Rhetoric. Each of these frameworks has subsidiary projects with a significant corpus of postgraduate projects and publications. The fourth and fifth and to some extent the first are relevant as far as systematic theology is concerned.

Third, the Department continues to offer the B.Th. programme also on a part-time basis with classes scheduled after hours on a rotating basis. This enabled students envisaging pastoral ministry as a second career to receive the necessary training. Often such classes are larger than full-time classes. This was continued even when all other departments in the Faculty of Arts terminated their offerings after hours. From 2007 onwards

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19 The academic staff members at the time were Woldemar Cloete, Ernst Conradie, Jerome Cornelissen, and Douglas Lawrie. Miranda Pillay was appointed on a contract basis at that time, which was made permanent soon thereafter. Christo Lombard was appointed in 2005 and John Klaasen in 2008 (following the early retirement of Jerome Cornelissen).

20 For publications emerging from these conferences, see Conradie (2004) and Conradie, Engdahl & Phiri (2015).

this was supplemented by the Programme for Lay Theological Education (PLATE) that forms part of UWC's efforts towards continuous education in the form of "short courses". Students can obtain 120 credits at NQF level 5 on this basis. While PLATE is deliberately aimed at the laity, i.e. those who are already serving as leaders in local congregations, for example as preachers, counsellors, Sunday School leaders, Bible Study group leaders, youth leaders, women's group leaders and leaders of Christian community organisations, a steady stream of students subsequently continue their studies at UWC towards the Bachelor of Theology.

Fourth, the Desmond Tutu Chair of Ecumenical Theology and Social Transformation was established in 2006, first filled through a rotating chair (e.g. by Charles Amjad-Ali), then by Christo Lombard in 2013 and by Sarojini Nadar in 2016. In 2018 a Desmond Tutu SARChI Chair for Religion and Social Justice was established, effectively seconding Prof Nadar to that chair.

Fifth, the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society was established in 2014 to serve as a platform for the projects of the Desmond Tutu Chair. The Centre has subsequently been renamed as the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice. Its research focuses on five thematic areas, namely religion and gender, religion and the economy, religion and the environment, religion and politics, and religion and education.[21]

Sixth, following several retirements (Woldemar Cloete, Douglas Lawrie, Christo Lombard and Miranda Pillay), and some succession planning, the staff establishment changed significantly by 2017 with the appointments of Tiana Bosman, Johnathan Jodamus, Teddy Sakupapa, Demaine Solomons, and Ignatius Swart. Virtually all of the academic staff come from either a Reformed / Presbyterian or the Anglican traditions – with the strengths and limitations that this implies.

The history of doing systematic theology (in particular) at UWC obviously needs to be understood and reconstructed against this institutional background. This will be done in a companion article.

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21 See https://desmondtutucentre-rsj.uwc.ac.za/about-us/ [Accessed: 21 November 2021].

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