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Reconstructing the history of doing *Systematic* Theology at UWC – Some fragmentary decolonial perspectives

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Abstract

On the basis of a companion article on reconstructing the history of doing theology at UWC, this article offers several qualifications on how to approach and not to approach doing *systematic* theology at UWC before eight soteriological themes that have been prominent in theological discourse at UWC are outlined, namely conversion / transformation, unity / ecumenicity, reconciliation, justice, human dignity, liberation, reconstruction / development, and the integrity of creation. It is suggested that the remarkable reception of Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor* typology at UWC is indicative of the always uneasy counter-intuitive attempt to hold together liberation, evangelical / reformed and liberal theologies – that is perhaps epitomised by UWC.

Keywords

Belhar Confession; church unity; decoloniality; development; human dignity; justice; integrity of creation; liberation; reconciliation; soteriology; Systematic Theology; University of the Western Cape

Introduction

This contribution builds upon a companion article on reconstructing the history of doing theology at the University of the Western Cape. Here the focus will be on doing "systematic" theology in particular. I will first offer several qualifications on how to approach and not to approach the study of systematic theology at UWC before outlining eight soteriological themes that have been prominent in theological discourse at UWC, namely conversion, unity / ecumenicity, reconciliation, justice, human dignity,

liberation, reconstruction / development and the integrity of creation. I will finally suggest that the remarkable reception of Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor* typology at UWC is indicative of the always uneasy attempt to hold together liberation, evangelical / reformed and liberal theologies – that is perhaps epitomised by doing theology at UWC.

On the term "systematic theology"

The history of doing, studying, teaching, and producing systematic theology at UWC is closely intertwined with the challenges around decolonisation faced by the university and the emergence of decolonial thinking within the university. Lecturers and students in theology, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, were at the fore*front* (often literally) of such developments.[1]

A note on the use of the term "systematic theology" is important here. Up to 1962 (thus well before the Faculty of Theology was established in 1973) students received training in "Christelike geloof en sedeleer" (Christian Faith and Ethics) at the Theological School of the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church in Wellington. In 1962 five departments were established, each offering a group of subjects, including "dogmatologie". However, this department had no lecturer of its own until Jaap Durand was appointed in 1973. According to the traditional "encyclopaedic" approach, "dogmatologie" included the history of doctrine, dogmatics (an exposition of doctrine), ethics (the imperative following the indicative articulated in doctrine), apologetics (in conversation with those standing outside the Christian faith, while the missiological sub-discipline of elenctic deals with dialogue with other faith traditions), polemics (conversation with other less than "orthodox" Christian traditions), and symbolics (a study of confessional documents). This structure and naming were maintained until it was replaced in 1995 by the subject "Christian Studies" and in 2000

1 Due to the extensive nature of the bibliography included here, no distinction is made in references in parenthesis between publications by the same author in the same year as this becomes hard to track consistently. In most cases the context would suffice. 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, for example in the oeuvres of Allan Boesak, Nico Botha, Russel Botman, Nico Koopman, Mary Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel, and Dirkie Smit.

by an integrated "Theological Studies". At present the term systematic theology is used officially only for one postgraduate module namely Theological Studies 739/839 named simply "Systematic Theology". Its content is described as "Capita selecta on themes in systematic theology and / or contributions of major systematic theologians" – which allows for a wide range of more specific themes in particular calendar years.

As far as I could establish, the name "systematic theology" was used as a translation for "Dogmatologie" when English equivalents became required for administrative purposes. When courses began to be offered in English, at least since Curriculum B was introduced in 1987 for churches other than the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church, "systematic theology" was indeed used for module names. Although the name "systematic theology" was widely used and therefore adopted at UWC, most of the lecturers teaching such modules at UWC (notably Jaap Durand and Dirkie Smit) would regard that term as a misnomer, typically commenting (partly in jest) that the most important feature of systematic theology is that it is not very systematic. Building theological "systems" is frowned upon as a rigid form of scholastics that unpacks the relations between God, humanity, and the world.

This raises thought provoking questions on what counts as systematic theology and how that is to be distinguished from biblical theology, constructive theology, ecumenical theology, fundamental theology, historical theology, missional theology, philosophical theology, practical theology, and so forth. One may argue that the older encyclopaedic approach to the study of theology allowed for a colonising curriculum while the names used since 1995 symbolise a desire not to be held hostage to names imposed from elsewhere. Given the use of the term systematic theology elsewhere, five features of teaching "systematic theology" at UWC may be briefly identified:

First, there is an obvious desire to resist the fragmentation of the curriculum, at first through an "encyclopaedic" approach but later especially through a recognition of the role of theological hermeneutics. All theological sub-disciplines are engaged in different aspects of the same task, namely, to relate text, tradition, and context with each other, critically and constructively (see Smit 1987, 1991).

Second, despite the overwhelming emphasis on contextuality in theological education, the curriculum remained "traditional" – at first with reference to the reformed tradition but increasingly with reference to the early spread of Christianity northwards, southwards. westwards, and eastwards. If there is a break with the colonising history of Western Christianity, this is not a break with Christian tradition as such. This tradition is anchored in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (325/381) as a point of reference (not departure) for all subsequent interpretations of the Christian faith, noting that it emerged under conditions of a Christianised empire, sometimes in collusion with political powers, sometimes in resistance of such powers. The Faith and Order study document entitled *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nice-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)* (1991) is often prescribed at UWC, indicating that teaching systematic theology remains deeply based in the ecumenical roots of the Christian tradition.

Third, there is an equally overwhelming emphasis on ecumenical theology. This is born from the deeply felt need to resist the ecumenical isolation that the Dutch Reformed Church found itself in by the 1960s. This emphasis on ecumenical theology is with reference to the ecumenical councils and ecumenical creeds of the early church but also to the modern ecumenical movement, with specific reference to the Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches, the South African Council of Churches, the All-Africa Conference of Churches (see Sakupapa 2017) and the World Council of Churches, the former World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the current World Communion of Reformed Churches. This emphasis is expressed through each of the main branches of the ecumenical movement (Unity, Faith and Order, Life and Work, Mission, Worship and Theological Education). Over several decades UWC colleagues have been deeply involved in such ecumenical processes, conferences, and proceedings.[2]

Fourth, teaching systematic theology (at least since 2000) follows a deliberately Trinitarian pattern, with an introductory module on Christian identity, followed by the doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine

2 See the volume of reflections on "notions and forms of ecumenicity" following a workshop at UWC in 2013, with UWC contributions by Edwin Arrison, Ernst Conradie, Christo Lombard, Hans Engdahl and Teddy Sakupapa (edited by Conradie 2013)

of the Holy Spirit and the church in ecumenical perspective (framed as Part B of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit). This structure allows ample room for a discussion of contextually relevant themes, including God as "Father" (patriarchy), creation (amid ecological destruction), providence (given poverty, unemployment, suffering, diseases such as the HIV/AIDS and the Covid-19 pandemics), Christ (and other religious traditions), atonement (and reconciliation in society), salvation (and liberation from oppression), justification (and justice), the filioque (and subsequent ecumenical divides), church (and society) and hope (amidst injustices, oppression, death and destruction). If the "world" does not "set the agenda" (as demanded in Life and Work ecumenism since Uppsala 1968), the aim of the Faith and Order agenda at UWC is to address ongoing concerns in the world.

Fifth, there seems to be a lack of interest in "apologetics" (as a conversation with modernity – see Durand 2005), while there has been a strong interest in "symbolics", given the role played by confessional documents, especially the Belhar Confession but also the Accra Confession. While ethics is sometimes studied without much reference to doctrine, at UWC doctrine is never really discussed without reference to some underlying ethical concerns. This may be why there has been such a sustained interest in the ecumenical project on "Ecclesiology and Ethics" (see Conradie 2013, Conradie, Engdahl & Phiri 2015, Sakupapa 2017, Bailey 2021, also Mahokoto 2014, as UWC alumnus).[3]

For the sake of a degree of demarcation I will focus on the discussion below mainly on contributions where there is some explicit association with Christian doctrine. Again, such a distinction remains arbitrary as doctrine and ethics, faith and spirituality, confession and praxis, liturgy and life, church and society, ecclesiology, and ethics, can scarcely be separated.

How, then, should the history of doing systematic theology at UWC be told? I will suggest that there are five levels to that history in order of *increasing* significance: 1) The publications of staff members; 2) The curriculum and prescribed textbooks in terms of undergraduate teaching; 3) Conferences

3 As George Lindbeck (2005) rightly observes, "Without Life and Work, Faith and Order is dead, but without the primacy of Faith and Order, Life and Work is deadly; it becomes a countersign of the church, simply another arena for pursuing political agendas." See also the report by Best & Robra (1997), often cited by UWC scholars.

hosted at UWC and visitors received; 4) Postgraduate theses written in the field (which provides a better indication of student interests); and 5) shifting paradigms in the dominant soteriological discourse amongst staff, students, and alumni.

In the discussion below I will offer a series of qualifications indicating why it is so difficult (for me) to offer decolonial perspectives on this history and why a UWC perspective on the history of systematic theology in South Africa is nevertheless of crucial importance.

Doing "Systematic Theology" at UWC: Several qualifications

Personal (dis)qualifications

First, although I have been a staff member at UWC for close to 29 years, there are some obvious personal factors that undermine my ability to offer a history of systematic theology at UWC. Considerations of race, gender, class, and age need not disqualify one (or else dialogue becomes impossible), but this should at least require some extreme caution to capture what was at stake. The same applies to discourse on decoloniality: I am a descendant of colonisers and the colonised, of slave owners and of a dozen or so slaves, but mostly of landowners and not of the landless, classified as "white" under apartheid and therefore a beneficiary of that ever since. My fragmentary observations below are those of a "white" staff member with the position of power and privileges, the limitations and probably the blindfolds that this implies. These therefore need to be complemented, corrected, and challenged by colleagues, students, and alumni. Again, such personal provisos need not by themselves preclude participation in discourse on decoloniality, but this can only be done through ongoing conversation.

Moreover, the formative years in the 1970s were clearly important but becomes harder to reconstruct as time passes. The immense passion with which theology was done at the time is still palpable but this has morphed into other manifestations and other locations where these conversations are continued. Such passion (and righteous anger) is best evident in the accounts of those who were students in the 1970s and 1980s – as is illustrated in the writings of Allan Boesak, Willa Boezak, Nico Botha, Russel Botman,

Nico Koopman, Japie Lapoorta, Mary Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel (see 2015), and Richard Stevens, amongst others (see also Thomas 2014, 2017).

Staff publications as misleading

Second, the research output of academic staff in the field of systematic theology was dominated in quantitative terms by three long-serving scholars namely Jaap Durand, Dirkie Smit (until 1999) and myself.[4] All three grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church and subsequently became members of URCSA. To focus on such research contributions inevitably skews the picture. Other staff members who made contributions to systematic theology include Richard Stevens, Nico Horn (who briefly held an appointment before moving to Namibia), Willa Boesak / Boezak, Andrew Phillips, Robin Petersen, Christo Lombard, Hans Engdahl (as long-standing extraordinary professor), while John Klaasen (working especially in practical theology), Demaine Solomons, Teddy Sakupapa and Robert Agyarko (as research fellow) made more recent contributions. It would be possible to study the oeuvres of these individual staff members and their conversation partners but that would hardly capture the dominant theological discourse at any given point in time. In this sense the bibliography included below is necessarily misleading as it is so much easier to refer to published work than to conversations among students that are arguably more important from a decolonial perspective. The profile of staff publications in systematic theology will undoubtedly shift in years to come.

In terms of staff research outputs the role of five publication initiatives needs to be noted that each also involves postgraduate students. The first is the series *Text and Context* that published seven volumes including a few postgraduate theses (Botha 1984, Botha 1989), textbooks and some staff publications (see Smit 1987, Durand 1988, Durand & Smit 1995). The second is the short-lived non-accredited journal *Apologia* that was published by the former Faculty of Theology from 1987 to around 1993. The third is the series of textbooks initiated by the Department of Religion and Theology

4 It is indeed striking to see how many staff members have shown a long-standing commitment and often selfless service in multiple ways to the institution. The example of Woldemar Cloete with around 37 years of service may suffice.

entitled Study Guides in Religion and Theology (see below). The fourth is a series entitled Studies in Ethics and Theology published by Bible Media, in which only four titles have appeared thus far (Conradie 2009, 2010, Coetzee 2010, Agyarko 2013). The fifth is the far more influential publications by the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa that continues to assist UWC and other scholars to publish especially conference proceedings on a wide range of topics.

It would also be possible to trace the influence of such colleagues and alumni on conferences held elsewhere in South Africa and especially the annual meetings of the Theological Society where UWC's role has been disproportionate given its size.[5] Obviously, UWC staff and students were deeply involved in national processes, for example in relation to the South African Council of Churches. Suffice it to say that "Black" staff members at UWC made significant contributions in terms of theological publications but that the racialized politics of knowledge production (in terms of opportunities, funding, access to publishers and markets) cannot be underestimated. From a decolonial perspective it would also be important to reflect on the conversation partners / interlocutors as reflected in the citations of publications by staff members.[6] A quantitative survey would

5 See Smit (2000) for this assessment. By 2000 the entire steering committee of the TSSA had UWC associations, namely Russel Botman (chairperson), Nico Koopman (secretary) and Ernst Conradie (congress secretary). A few TSSA meetings took place at UWC, e.g. in 1984 (see Smit 1985), 2001 (see Conradie 2002) and 2013.

6 Four impressions may suffice here. First, those staff members (Conradie, Durand, Lombard, Smit) who received formative training in systematic theology at Stellenbosch University clearly maintained conversations with European reformed theologies. Second, it is striking that UWC scholars (like other South African scholars) maintain long-standing conversations with individual long-distance conversation partners, for example with Gustaf Aulén (see Solomons 2017, 2019), Herman Bavinck (Conradie 2013), Gerrit Berkouwer (Durand 1975, 1978, 1982), Karl Barth (see Durand 1988, Lombard 2013, Smit 1988, 2000, 2008), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Botman 1994), James Cone (see Solomons & Klaasen 2019), Jürgen Moltmann (see Durand 1974, Conradie 2008), Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr (see Smit 1990), Rosemary Radford Ruether (notably the only obvious female example, see Ackermann 2008), David Tracy (Conradie 1996, 2021), Arnold van Ruler (see Lombard 1983, 1996, 2009, 2012, 2019) and Geoffrey Wainwright (Smit 1999). Such conversations are reflected in two volumes of *Scriptura* on "How are They Telling the Story?" (Conradie 2008). Third, an ecumenical orientation and the use of English enable South African scholars to draw not only from other South African authors, but also far and wide from Europe, the UK, North America, Australia, Latin America (albeit in translated form) and Anglophone Africa. This is far from typical in other centres of excellence! Fourth, there is a gradual shift in the broadening

be a huge undertaking but will also require a critical analysis on the basis of the actual content of such publications, the themes discussed and the (affirmative or critical) nature of the citations.

A disjunction between teaching and learning?

Third, it would be interesting to gather curricula and module outlines from one decade to the next in order to establish what themes were addressed in systematic theology and which books were prescribed. Such archival material is hardly available any longer. It is even hard to find and document changes in the curriculum.

As a general impression in terms of prescribed material one could guess that there was a shift from textbooks produced in Dutch by Dutch reformed scholars, imported for South African consumption, to textbooks and lecture notes produced in Afrikaans but still derived from such Dutch (also German) sources, to prescribed material written by South African lecturers (not only at UWC) in conversation mainly with Dutch and German authors and issues (see Durand 1976, 1978, 1982, also 2007), to material that also engages in conversations with British and later American authors (Smit 1987, Conradie et al 1995), to material produced in conversation with Latin American (liberation) theology, North American Black theology and North-Atlantic feminist theology, to material produced in South Africa by South African authors addressing South African challenges (Conradie 2005, Conradie et al 2006), to conversations with authors from elsewhere in Africa, addressing typically African issues (e.g. Conradie & Fredericks 2004), to prescribed material that reflect participation in global dialogue on global issues given the divide between the global South and the global North.

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of such conversation partners not so much away from Europe but certainly towards other countries in Africa.

In the context of decolonial discourse it would be interesting to compare how such UWC staff members engaged critically with specific European conversation partners that are studied widely elsewhere, especially Abraham Kuyper (see Botman 2001, Conradie 2011, Durand 1988), Herman Bavinck (Conradie 2013, Smit 2018), Karl Barth (see Durand 1988, Smit 1988, 2008), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Botman 1994), Arnold van Ruler (Lombard 1983, 1996, Conradie 2013) and Jürgen Moltmann (Conradie 2008, Durand 1974). The essay by Durand (1988) on the shift in allegiance from Kuyper to Barth and the subsequent return to Bavinck (and Van Ruler) is particularly striking.

It needs to be noted that Jaap Durand (1975, 1978, 1982, 1985[2]) contributed three volumes to an influential series (with Willie Jonker) entitled *Wegwysers in die Dogmatiek*, namely on the doctrines of God, sin and creation, humanity, and providence. The Department of Religion promoted a series of textbooks entitled Study Guides in Religion and Theology, published by SUN Press), that deliberately attempt to make readily available textbooks and postgraduate resources that are both affordable and contextually relevant. Thus far 13 such study guides have been published, including a few in systematic theology (see Conradie & Fredericks 2004, Conradie 1998, 2005, 2006).

This impression would need to be tested through further research but would need to suffice for the moment. Either way, one may well expect some discrepancy between teaching and learning, what the lecturers thought they taught and what the students actually learned and appropriated.[7] As Smit (2007:88) captures this, "theological students played a major role during these years, both on and off campus, to challenge the apartheid society, but also the university structures, and the content of their own training … They experienced the theology taught in the seminaries and the faculties as irrelevant, useless, alien. This became very clear in empirical research done by a former UWC-colleague in Practical Theology [Gustaf Bam]. The students often revolted against Western theology, against curricula, against text-books, against institutions." For example, in 1979 students protested against staff members suspected to be members of the Broederbond (Philander 2019:158). In 1984 students in the Faculty of Theology initiated a general class boycott, insisting that, where applicable, all lecturers in the Faculty decline their legitimation by the Dutch Reformed Church (see Philander 2019:160).

7 The difference in this regard may be illustrated by an amusing anecdote derived from a Pentecostal student who informed me that he was part of a study group in the 1990s. The group prayed for one another to study hard, to retain the knowledge required to pass the exams, but also to thereafter forget what they had learned for fear that the content may contaminate them and undermine their faith! Another part-time student explained that he valued his studies very much indeed, but that we should please not inform church officials in his denomination that he is studying at UWC for fear that this would side-line him given an emphasis on guidance directly received from the Holy Spirit.

This raises issues of pedagogy in theological education in general but, following Paulo Freire (1994), especially on a "pedagogy of the oppressed" – which has been widely discussed at UWC (see Thomas 2014, Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2015), also in the field of theology. Appropriate models for theological education were discussed in every decade anew.[8] Most theological institutions recognise three aims for theological education, namely spiritual formation ("Athens"), academic excellence ("Berlin") and practical training for the ministry (see Kelsey 1993). At UWC these have been affirmed but qualified by the need for a liberative spirituality, a resistance against ivory tower academic research unrelated to challenges in society, and against theological education for a professional pastoral elite. Instead, theological education was understood with reference to "Lima" (standing for poverty – Herzog 1994) or Calcutta / Cape Town (Conradie 1997). As Dirkie Smit (2007:89) observes, Herzog's vehement plea (to USA readers) to recognise the significance of "Lima" for theological education rings true in the South African context, especially at UWC:

> Lima reminds us that "seeing" God is never direct, always indirect. *Paideia* (Athens) and *Wissenschaft* (Berlin) have to be brought under the scrutiny of the vast encampments of the poor who are banging, as it were, at the doors of our theological schools … The self-orientation (the *cogito, ergo sum*) of modernity will have to make room for the *amor, ergo sumus* (I am being loved; therefore we are). It will take a radical overturning of our present theological gaze. The poor will not let us off the hook … Considered yourself forewarned. Things theological will change (Herzog 1994:276).

Topics in postgraduate research

Fourth, the topics chosen by postgraduate students for their research projects are not necessarily indicative of the underlying discourse in systematic theology. The first master's student graduated in 1980 (Song 1980) on Chinese religion, seven years after the Faculty of Theology was established, while the first Doctoral student graduated in 1983 on the

8 This is also reflected in staff publications on theological education. See especially Botha (1987), Loff (1987), Stevens (1987), Robinson & Smit (1996), Smit (1993, 1999), also Conradie (1997, 2015). This would undoubtedly need to be explored in more depth if a history of practical theology at UWC were to be written.

Synod of Dordt (Van Zyl 1983). Remarkably, three of the theses before 1985 dealt with Chinese religion, the Tabligh movement in Islam (Cilliers 1983) and Jewish evangelism (Codrington 1985). This is remarkable but hardly indicative of student interests at that time. By the end of the 1980s only a handful of doctoral students completed their studies in systematic theology and most of them were "white" members of the then DRMC.[9] The first master's students who received their undergraduate training at UWC itself included Willa Boesak (1982), Russel Botman (1984) and Neville Swartz (1987) (all in systematic theology), while the first home-grown doctoral student in the field of systematic theology was Russel Botman (only in 1994). The first women to complete postgraduate theses were Elna Mouton (D.Th. in NT Ethics, 1995) and Margaret Steinegger-Keyser (Masters in Ethics, 1995).

Distinctions between theological sub-disciplines were formally maintained but the boundaries between dogmatics and ethics (see Koopman 2000, Vosloo 1994, Koopman & Vosloo 2002, and many contributions by Smit, e.g. 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996), Biblical studies and ethics, church law and dogmatics, worship and ethics (see Phillips 1996, Smit 1997, Conradie 2013) church history and ethics (see Adonis 1982), practical theology and ethics (e.g. Botman 1994) and systematic theology and missiology are often blurred and deliberately so. Typically, these disciplines are held together by an interest in hermeneutics, the ethics of interpretation and also by the role of rhetoric in the public sphere (see especially the many contributions by Smit, e.g. 1987, 1990, 1991, 1995, 1996). Within the broad field of systematic theology (with its numerous sub-disciplines) the interest in doctrine is often derived from ethical considerations in the socio-political context[10] or from ministerial needs. Since 2000, with the introduction of ethics as a field within religious studies, the distinction between theology and religion was maintained, also in the name of the department, but many postgraduate students are trained in both disciplines and find it difficult to make clear-cut distinctions.

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9 See Christo Lombard (1983), Andries Botha (1985), Nico Horn (1988), Johan Botha (1989) and Stiaan van der Merwe (1989).

10 See especially Jaap Durand's collected essays on church and politics in *Teks binne Konteks* (1987) and his typology of the relationship between church and state (1987, 1988).

Most postgraduate students study part-time so that ministerial experiences and/or social challenges shaped their interests. The role of supervisors and their interests and conversations partners need to be factored in here as well. There was a disproportionate early interest in Missiology – which may well have something to do with the legendary ability of Phil Robinson to pull students through. Another factor is the UWC alumni who obtained postgraduate qualifications elsewhere, for example in Kampen, Utrecht, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam or Princeton during the apartheid years. In systematic theology the obvious example here is Allan Boesak's early contributions to Black theology (see 1976). Inversely, quite a few students, including foreign students and other "white" students, especially from Stellenbosch University or UCT, came to UWC for Masters or Doctoral studies.[11] Especially since 2000 a steady stream of students from other African countries completed postgraduate studies at UWC, stirring interest in the discourse on African Christian theology (see Oppong-Poku 2001, Sakuba 2004, Agyarko 2006, 2010, Fischer 2008, Sakuba 2013, Brooks 2015, Fischer 2015, Kondolo 2016, Sakupapa 2017). Many of these postgraduate studies form part of a larger project on "Mapping Systematic Theology in Africa" registered at UWC (see Conradie & Fredericks 2004, also Engdahl 2020).

Suffice it to say that the themes of postgraduate theses are certainly interesting but offer no accurate yardstick to judge decolonial thinking in theology at UWC.[12]

Conferences hosted at UWC

Fifth, it is well-nigh impossible to offer an overview of conferences hosted at UWC touching on aspects of systematic theology over a period of five decades. This applies also to the conferences and camps organised by theological students themselves. Clearly, those who were invited to come,

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11 In the 1990s see, e.g. De Gruchy (1992), Herholdt (1992), Woest (1993), Van Breda (1994), Vosloo (1994), Baumann (1997), Strauss (1997), Van Niekerk (1997), all supervised by Dirkie Smit.

12 Some of these were published in the UWC series *Text and Context* (until 1998) and some in a series *Studies in Ethics and Theology* (published by Bible Media). The titles relevant to systematic theology are interesting, but notably dominated by "white" students studying at UWC. See Andries Botha (1984), Johan Botha (1989), Coetzee 2011) and Agyarko (200).

indicate some sense of direction in terms of conversation partners and issues to be addressed. Additionally, the UWC maintained the cultural boycott in the 1970s and 1980s that had an influence on who were allowed as visitors, especially from abroad. Many others were in exile or banned from entering the country during the apartheid period. Suffice it to mention only a few luminaries such as Steve Biko in the mid-1970s, Jürgen Moltmann in 1978 and again 2017, while Beyers Naudé was a regular visitor. A significant workshop on what mission entails, with representatives from several churches in the DRC-family was convened at UWC in 1986 (see Robinson & Botha 1986).[13] The 2003-conference on "African Christian Theologies in Transformation: Respice et Prospice" amounted to a who's who in the field, including John Mbiti, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, John Pobee and Jesse Mugambi from outside South Africa (see Conradie 2004). Of course, Desmond Tutu as the much beloved and long-standing UWC Chancellor regularly addressed students and staff at the university.

The significance of doing theology amongst students

Sixth, and crucially, the discourse amongst students is not necessarily documented and can hardly be captured by someone who was not present at a given time. One may say that up to around 1976 the students were struggling to find their own voice mainly because they were measuring themselves against foreign standards for higher education. Between 1976 and 1994 the students certainly had a voice of their own, but this was developed through programmes, camps, student conferences and rallies that ran parallel to official teaching and learning.[14] Such student workshops addressed themes such as liberation theology, black theology, the meaning

13 As reported by Van der Watt (2010:165–166), participants at the conference, following a paper by David Bosch formulated a joint working definition of mission: "The church's mission (missio ecclesiae) flows from the realization that mission is first and foremost God's mission (missio Dei) and that the churches' calling to a holistic witness (marturia) should include the following dimensions: proclaiming the Word (kerugma), acts/services of love (diakonia), the forming of a new community of love and unity (koinonia), the zeal for a just society (dikaioma) and worship (leitourgia)."

14 I am relying here on correspondence with Dirkie Smit who mentioned conferences organized by the students themselves, for example on human rights, on economic justice and on Kaj Munk. He reports that the programmes included well-known speakers, that these were very well attended and that the students were enthusiastic and passionate about such theological conversations, all outside the official curriculum. See also Philander (2019:150–164) and Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2015).

of race, class, culture and ethnic identity, Black consciousness, "Coloured" identity, gender and patriarchy, human dignity and human rights, democracy, socialism, capitalism and so forth. Reflection on such themes shaped the UWC students and their understanding of religion, justice the economy and politics. They had to reassess their theological presuppositions in the light of contemporary challenges, seeking to understand current realities in the light of God's Word (see Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2015:504).

This was a time characterised by very vibrant discussions, by student protests against apartheid and also against (some of) their own teachers, by underground activities, by detention without trial and so forth. Understandably, what was said in private conversations could not be repeated in public for fear of reprisals. For example, in 1976, Leonardo Appies, a theology student and SRC Chairperson, was held in Victor Verster, while Peter Gelderbloem was arrested a day before his trial sermon (see Durand 2000). The best guide for this period may be Allan Boesak's writings at the time. As student chaplain and inspiring preacher he was extremely influential amongst students (probably more so than any of the lecturers at the time) and was able to articulate their fears, dreams and views also to the outside world.[15] One may also draw on the later writings of those who were students in the late 1970s and 1980s, including Nico Botha, Russel Botman, Nico Koopman, Japie Lapoorta and Mary Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel (e.g. 2013, 2015, 2017). Such perspectives are crucial for reconstructing the history of doing (systematic) theology at UWC. It is not for me to tell or even to collect such stories, only to recognise their primary significance.

After 2000 and until 2015 the voice of theology students, at least as a group, became muted for other reasons. Several attempts to establish a theology student society were short-lived. They hardly had an influence on student politics and my impression is that there was little "doing theology" taking place on campus outside of the classrooms. Perhaps this changed with the student protests that erupted in 2015 although a distinctively theological emphasis remained hard to find. A better indication may come from those who were undergraduate students in the 1990s or early 2000s

15 See Boesak's autobiographical *Running with Horses* (2009), where he reflects on the main events and his speeches during that time.

and were subsequently appointed as lecturers (elsewhere) and continued the conversations there. These include Daniel Andrew (Sarepta), Eugene Baron (UFS), Jacques Beukes (UP), John Klaasen (UWC), Xolani Sakuba (UKZN), Sipho Mahokoto (SU), Xolile Simon (Missiology, SU), Demaine Solomons (UWC) and Rothney Tshaka (Unisa).

Christian theology and the study of other religions

Finally, any academic study of systematic theology is confronted with challenges around the relationship between Christian theology, particularly the Christian faith, the study of other faith traditions and religious studies. This is far from innocent as the allegiance between Christianity and colonial powers indicate, together with the impact that this has had on the establishment of universities and in particular of Faculties of Theology in South Africa. Any decolonial engagement with the study of the Christian faith at UWC would therefore need to grapple with the marginalisation of other faith traditions irrespective of their proportional size. Indeed, at UWC the future of Christian theology may well lie in its ability to allow the study of Islam (from the inside) to flourish. There are, in fact, current initiatives to introduce Islamic Studies as a major subject for undergraduate degrees.

At UWC such tensions are embedded in the name of the former faculty and the current Department of Religion and Theology. As I have often observed, the most intriguing word in the name is the "and" that suggests the possibility of doing justice to both the study of religion and of (in this case Christian) theology. This is a bold claim, especially given the former danger of absorbing religious studies under the banner of missiology and the current tendency to adopt a religious studies methodology under the rubric of "Christian studies" – where doing systematic theology is typically undermined.

As indicated above, there has been considerable interest in the study of other religious traditions in the former Faculty of Theology, almost from its inception. One may also mention the name change from Biblical Studies to Biblical and Religious Studies of the former department in the then Faculty of Arts, the short-lived Department of Religious Studies (1995–1999), the role of Ethics as a major in its focus on the "moral and religious foundations of society since 2000, the introduction of Honours modules

in Islamic Studies since 2014, quite a few Masters and Doctoral projects in Islamic Studies, and the presence of Arabic Studies (situated in the so-called Department of "Foreign" Languages) that allows for cooperation in postgraduate supervision. In seeking to do justice to both religion studies and theology, UWC is distinct from the neighbouring University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University.

My observation is that this reflects the demography of UWC in terms of its students and the academic staff – which include Africanists, Baha'i's Buddhists, Christians, Jews, retrievals of Khoi culture and religion, Muslims, and Rastafarians. Such colleagues are deeply committed to their faith traditions and find it quite possible to work alongside one another in building the institution without seeking to blend these religious traditions into one. This also reflects the demography of the region where Christians and Muslims have been able to live together more or less peacefully – in District Six and on the Cape Flats alike – for more than three centuries despite colonial hegemony. Such coexistence is exemplified by UWC, more so than at the traditionally "white" neighbouring institutions such as UCT and SU where either Christianity or secularism dominates.

Underlying soteriologies

Soteriology may well be regarded as the nerve centre of systematic theology. This is where one may trace how the gospel becomes situated in a particular context, how a moment of truth is discerned, how the "finger of God"[16] in (human) history is understood (or misunderstood), and where contestations may be found.

Soteriology as one doctrinal theme amongst others

This focus on soteriology needs to be immediately qualified since one theme cannot be studied in isolation from others. Of course, there has been sustained interest also in other doctrinal themes, including the doctrine

16 See the collections of sermons by Boesak (1979), the critical reflections on the image of the finger of God by Durand (1980), and Smit's appraisal of Durand's recognition of historical consciousness (2009).

of the Triune God[17] (see Durand 1974, 1976, 2005, Smit 1984, 1994, also Van Niekerk 1997, Conradie 2006, 2013, Conradie & Sakupapa 2018, Sakupapa 2019, Pedro 2020), Christology (see Botman 1984, Smit 1986, 1987, 1988, Durand 1974, 1993, Festus 2008, Agyarko 2010, Conradie 2011, Dankers 2020) and Pneumatology (see Smit 2001, Reichard 2010, Conradie 2001, 2012, 2021, Lombard 2012, Sakupapa 2012). The same applies to anthropology (see below on human dignity) and ecclesiology (see below on church unity), especially the uniqueness of the church and its witness in society (Smit 1981, Smit & De Villiers 1994, 1995, Smit 1996, Strauss 1997, Strauss & Smit 1998), and the sacraments (e.g. Phillips 1996, Smit 1982).

Except for staff publications by Jaap Durand (see 1982), Ernst Conradie (see 2013, 2014, 2015), and Christo Lombard (see 1996) there has been little interest at UWC in the doctrine of creation. This seems to be a clear example where staff and student interests are not necessarily correlated. This is rather telling given the correlation between power relations and the doctrine of creation, best illustrated by apartheid theology as a form

17 One may claim that UWC has been the leading institution in South Africa in reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity. Durand's sustained contributions not only formally addresses the topic in more depth than other treatments (except perhaps for Brian Gaybba) but placed the emphasis on the living God, a God of history and thus on the economic Trinity. See already his second Doctoral thesis (1973) and the article on the basis of that (1974), as well as Smit's masterly discussion of the significance of such a historical notion of God (Smit 2009). Smit also addressed the theme in numerous contributions, adopting a consistently Trinitarian approach to other theological themes (employing what Noordmans described as "Trinitarian spreading"). See also his remarkably insightful article on the doctrine of the Trinity in the Reformed Tradition (Smit 2009). Following Van Ruler's provocative essay on the necessity of a Trinitarian theology, Conradie contributed several articles (e.g. 2013, 2020) in which he argued that only a fully Trinitarian theology will do but that claims in this regard remain facile if the relationship between the work of Father and Son (creation and salvation), Son and Spirit (inside or outside the church) and Father and Spirit (in relation to other spiritualities and religions) is not addressed. In recent contributions Sakupapa recognised the tension between the continuity thesis in African Christian theology (posing an identity between the Supreme Being of African Traditional Religion and the God of Christianity) and Christian resistance against subordinationism (see also Agyarko 2010). Sakupapa especially highlights the significance of this debate for discourse on decoloniality. Conradie and Sakupapa suggest that there is indeed a need to decolonise the doctrine of the Trinity (in response to the Trinitarian renaissance in Western theologies), but that the decolonising thrust of an emphasis on the Triune God should not be underestimated. Over and above these individual contributions, teaching systematic theology at UWC has been structured on a Trinitarian basis, at least since 1995, with current modules on the doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and on the church (as part of the work of the Spirit).

of creation theology (see the comparison with Stellenbosch University in Conradie & Pauw 2011). This applies even more so to discourse on theology and the natural sciences, with specific reference to evolutionary history. After his retirement in 1994 Jaap Durand continued to work in this field, publishing two books in this regard, namely a biography on Teilhard de Chardin entitled *Evolusie, Wetenskap en Geloof* (2013) and *Godsgeheim: Die Verhaal van Wetenskap en Mistieke Geloof* (2015).[18]

There has been some interest in the doctrine of providence, building on the textbook by Durand (1982). This applies even more so to the related themes of God's involvement in (human) suffering (on the theodicy problem see especially Durand's inaugural lecture, 1974, also Mokgoebo 1989, Conradie 2005, 2006, 2018, Harold 2013), to God's work of conservation despite the impact of sin, God's governance in history (see especially the important essay by Durand (1980) on the "finger of God in history) and to an understanding of concursus (see Reichard 2010). If narrower doctrinal discussions on providence are widened to reflect theologically on injustice, oppression, evil and the suffering that all of this brings, then this becomes a core theme at UWC but also then evokes soteriological discussions (see below).

Understandably, there has been considerable interest in the theme of Christian hope (surprisingly no postgraduate theses though), but less so in traditional eschatological themes such as the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead (see Durand 1993, 2010; Conradie 2006), or eternal life (Conradie 2005). The typically Reformed theme of the coming reign of God permeates well-nigh all the discussions but is not often addressed explicitly (see several essays in Durand 1987, Fischer 2015, Koopman 2009, Lombard 2009, Smit 1986, and an excellent contribution to the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* by Smit 2002).

In contexts of contestation, where radical distortions prevail and suspicions of heresy are frequently raised, it comes as no surprise that there are ample critiques of natural theology and questions on appropriate ways of doing theology, on matters related to revelation, Scripture, and the like. Such

18 An engagement with both the natural and the social sciences permeates each of my own major research projects on the themes of hope, anthropology, creation, and sin. On evolution, see the articles listed under Conradie (2018).

interest is especially evident from the oeuvres of Jaap Durand, Dirkie Smit and Ernst Conradie as long-standing staff members.[19]

However, contrasting notions of salvation (e.g. as liberation, reconciliation, or reconstruction) offer a better indication of underlying theological discourse. It also indicates how the Christian message of salvation (to use this as a generic term) comes to terms with the lasting impact of colonisation. The question is therefore whether one may identify soteriological trends in theological discourse at UWC. It is easy enough to identify themes but much harder to describe such trends. Typically, theological movements arrive at UWC in waves with different waves present at the same time.[20] Let me then offer a few fragmentary observations that may well be applicable to other locations in the country. These observations would again need to be scrutinised by others.

Conversion and social transformation

First, it is fair to say that many theology students arrive at UWC after an evangelical and nowadays Pentecostal upbringing that centres around personal conversion. "Giving your heart to the Lord" needs to be situated in the context of lower middle-class homes that face (political and economic) challenges from the outside and are surrounded by the many traps of poverty, including gangsterism, drug trafficking, alcoholism, prostitution, gambling, indebtedness, and the like. Parents (especially mothers) find their faith and going to church several times a week the strongest way to

19 See the bibliography below for ample references in this regard, especially on theological hermeneutics and rhetorics, e.g. Durand (2002, 2001), Smit (1987, 1988, 1997), Conradie (2008, 2010, 2011, 2020).

20 Smit (2007:88) (based on a 1999 essay) captures this in terms of various slogans that became popular at times at UWC: "In the early seventies *black* theology became a battle-cry amongst many students and ministers in the country, particularly in the circles of black consciousness. Towards the end of the seventies the expression *contextual* theology became more popular. In the early eighties the notion of *prophetic* theology was winning the day amongst those who wanted to see more relevant theology being done in South Africa. During the latter part of the eighties the *Kairos*-document became so widely known in South Africa that *kairos* theology became the slogan everyone understood. Opponents and critics of these movements, often inspired by overseas fundamentalist interests, regularly used the expression *liberation* theology to lump these typically South African initiatives together with international theological trends. At the moment, calls for *Africanisation* are becoming more and more popular." He could have added feminist theologies and now also LQBTQI+ theology.

preserve themselves and hopefully their children from the forces of evil that often surround them. Many students come with life stories of how they managed to (or failed to) address such challenges. The cry, "Deliver us from evil!" (see Brooks 2015) has a personal ring to it and is readily expanded towards a social awareness of understanding how such traps are related to the structural violence associated with systemic poverty, endemic unemployment, and gross inequality. This implies the need to spell out the structural implications of *metanoia*, namely in terms of social transformation, and more recently also what Pope Francis would call ecological conversion. Indeed, the social significance of evangelical theology should not be underestimated (see also Harris 1989, Anderson 1996, Jansen 2008, Harold 2013). It is therefore not surprising that there has been a sustained interest in notions of sin, evil and wickedness (see Brooks 2015, Cloete 2014, 2021, Conradie 2005, 2016, 2017, 2020, Durand 1978, Sakuba 2004, Sakupapa 2020, Solomons 2020).

Church unity and ecumenicity

Second, especially in the 1970s and early 1980s many of the debates centred around church unity, understood especially as the elusive unity between the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church but also within the Apostolic Faith Mission (see Lapoorta 1996, Van der Merwe 2001, Andrew 2005), the Seventh Day Adventist Church (which may account for the cooperation between Helderberg College and UWC) and other churches divided on the basis of race. The soteriological core of this debate is perhaps best expressed in the titles of books by the church historian Chris Loff (1981), *Dogter of Verstoteling?* ("Daughter or outcast"?) and his dissertation *Bevryding tot Eenwording* ("Liberation towards Unity", 1998) and by another church historian Hannes Adonis in his doctoral thesis "Die Afgebreekte Skeidsmuur weer Opgebou" (1982). Another expression of this emphasis on unity is Richard Stevens' book *Community Beyond Division* (1983). Being rejected or regarded as inferior on the basis of race, even in the church, inspired numerous outcries and an affirmation of unity in Christ. The cry for church unity is therefore nothing theoretical but born from daughter churches becoming outcasts on the basis of race. Indeed, seeking "unity" with predominantly "white" churches aligned with forces of oppression is deeply counter-intuitive and

understandably subject to decolonial suspicion (in the sense of attempts to share in colonising privileges). The resistance against apartheid divisions was crystal clear while the link between unity and justice was crucial.

The first main article of the Belhar Confession on church unity expresses what was widely believed amongst UWC alumni, students, and staff at that time (see especially Cloete & Smit 1984,). This indicates that such unity can only be achieved through authenticity expressed in worship (see Engelbrecht 1995) and the Holy Communion (see Phillips 1996), through resisting heresy and, by recognising "a moment of truth", through the mode of a confessing church. Here the examples of the Barmen Declaration and the confessing church movement proved inspirational (see Govender 1984; Horn 1984, 1988, Botha 1998). Ironically, despite such calls for unity, there is also an ongoing fragmentation of local churches – also in the very suburb of Belhar, as the more recent studies by Anofuechi (2015) and Bock (2021) show. Indeed, the significance of ecclesial unity is no longer appreciated, neither in society, nor in the church (Smit 2003).

It is therefore not surprising that there remains a lively interest in the role of ecumenical relationships (if not necessarily in formal church unity) at UWC. Interestingly, this enabled a critique of the isolation evident in Afrikaner theology (see Durand 1985, 2002, Engdahl 2006, 2012, 2013). Likewise, in his doctoral study Murray Coetzee (2010, also Coetzee & Conradie 2011) observes that it is especially ecumenical exposure that incited the critical voices of Ben Marais and Beyers Naudé from within the Dutch Reformed Church. With Teresa Okure, Hans Egdahl also edited a special edition of the *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church on "Ecclesiology in Africa"* (2008).

The long-standing and sustained interest in ecumenical theology is for example evident from a four-year project on the ecumenical theme of ecclesiology and ethics (2012–2015) that explored the interplay between what the church is and what the church does, leading to several publications (see Conradie 2013, Conradie & Klaasen 2013, Conradie & Pillay 2015, Conradie, Engdahl & Phiri 2015). In a volume entitled *South African Perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity* Ernst Conradie (2013) unpacks various notions and forms of ecumenicity (with UWC responses from Edwin Arrison, Hans Engdahl, Christo Lombard

and Teddy Sakupapa). Teddy Sakupapa (2017) and Jerome Bailey (2021) explored the ecumenical relationship between ecclesiology and ethics in their postgraduate projects, while Sakupapa (2018, 2020, also Nalwamba & Sakupapa 2016) offers specifically African perspectives on ecumenical theology and ecclesiology.

The symbol of reconciliation

Third, the theme of reconciliation emerged in the late 1970s as a burning issue. It was framed as reconciliation in Christ and therefore in the church as the body of Christ but the need for and the controversies around the ministry of reconciliation in a society structured by apartheid was obviously driving the debate forward. From a decolonial perspective the highlight of the history of studying systematic theology at UWC was undoubtedly a rightly famous class discussion in 1978 where a distinct *theological* critique of apartheid was formulated by the students following some prompts by Jaap Durand (see 1977, 1982): apartheid assumed the fundamental irreconcilability of people.[21] In society this leads to injustice but if this is justified within the church, this amounts to heresy. This class discussion prompted a chain of events leading to resolutions at the Synod of the DRMC in 1978, the declaration of apartheid as a heresy by the then World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1981 and the Belhar Draft Confession of 1982.

Interest in reconciliation never really waned although it remained controversial in the 1980s (see Smit 1986), during the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the 1990s (see the contributions in Botman & Peterson 1996, Finger 1998, Klaasen 1997, Smit 1995, also Asmal, Asmal & Roberts 1996), and ever since. Such suspicions over reconciliation were also expressed by Jakes Gerwel (2000), the former UWC rector. No wonder Allan Boesak (2012) had to qualify reconciliation with the adjective "radical". Of course, there is also the towering if diminutive figure of Desmond Tutu, the long-standing UWC Chancellor in steering

21 The participants in the class discussion included Leonardo Appies, Nico Botha, Russel Botman, James Buys and Jaap Durand. See the account by Russel Botman (1996), also by Durand (2016).

discussions on reconciliation, forgiveness, justice, and peace (see Tutu 1999, Battles 1997).

Subsequent developments included a postgraduate module on the concept of reconciliation in the context of the TRC, regularly offered by Hans Engdahl and Antjie Krog, a Magister thesis by Charles Oppong-Poku (2001) on reconciliation, a Magister thesis by Lerato Kobe (2014) on the relatedness of remorse and a willingness to offer forgiveness, a workshop on "Reconciliation as a Guiding Vision in South Africa" (see the contributions in Conradie 2013), and especially the PhD thesis by Demaine Solomons (2017) on reconciliation as a controversial yet intriguing symbol (see also Solomons 2019, 2020). This interest in the theme of reconciliation is taken further through international collaboration with colleagues from Canada, Norway and Sweden on Truth and Reconciliation Commissions that were set up to deal with the history of oppression associated with the Indigenous populations in these countries. A volume entitled *Trading Justice for Peace?* is forthcoming (see Solomons, Guðmarsdóttir, Regan 2021).

Indeed, there can be little doubt that UWC has been by far not the only but nevertheless probably the institution leading (theological) reflection on reconciliation in South Africa and perhaps globally over more than four decades. Through the Belhar Confession it anchored the Protestant concerns over both justification as well as justice in reconciliation in Christ. More recently, Thias Kgatla (a former URCSA Moderator) was appointed as Extraordinary Professor in the Department of Religion and Theology in order to study and maintain the legacy of the Belhar Confession.

A theo-logical quest for justice

Fourth, the theme of justice in its many forms is of obvious significance throughout the history of a university that was established on the basis of injustice and that draws students for whom injustice is a regular, sometimes daily experience. Justice is typically addressed as an ethical theme. While Christian ethics forms part of the broad field of systematic theology it is important to note the specifically theological focus of discussions at UWC. This was a common theme in the circles of the Belydende Kring (BK) and the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa (ABRECSA), reflected in several statements at the time in which UWC staff and alumni

played a leading role.[22] According to the BK statement, God is committed to God's own justice in order to make the world a habitable place. It was expressed especially in the fourth article of the Belhar Confession with its famous formulation that "God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged" and that "God calls the church to follow him in this, for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry" (see Carelse 2017, Platt 2017, Smit 1984, 1985, several essays in 2007). Justice therefore forms part of God's identity and character. It is a confessional concern and "a testimony to the liberating activity of God in history" (Botman 2006:145).

This does not mean that God has favourites, loving some more than others. Instead, it is precisely because God loves creatures *equally* that God stands on the side of the oppressed. This leaves an unresolved problem that captured the imagination of many UWC scholars,[23] namely on the relationship between the dual reformed emphases on justification and on justice (e.g. Botman 2002). Remarkably, those who emphasise justification often underplay justice and vice versa (see Conradie 2018). The lasting injustices clearly prompt the need for some form of restoration or restitution (see Nkosi 2016), but how is this then related to justification through grace alone? How is the emphasis on the "universality" of sin to be reconciled with a clear-cut distinction between victims and perpetrators of injustice?

Either way, UWC students and staff were quick to recognise the relevance of such a theological notion of justice in different spheres of society, including of course the need for a just political dispensation and for social justice, but also for economic justice (Damon 1995, Smit 1996, 2003), environmental justice (e.g. Conradie & Field 2000, Conradie et al 2001, Conradie, Mtetwa & Warmback 2002) and gender justice (emphasised especially in current programmes of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice).

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22 For a collection of these statements see the *Apartheid is a Heresy* (De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio 1983). See also the article by Kritzinger (2010) comparing the BK statement with the Belhar Confession with recognition of the role played by Chris Loff. My thanks to Pieter Grove for pointing me in this direction.

23 See especially the numerous contributions on justice by Botman (2009), Durand (e.g. 2014), Koopman, and Smit (1996, e.g. in 2007, 2009). The first volume of Smit's collected essays was produced upon request for a postgraduate module on South African theologies offered in 2007. See also the contributions in the Festschrift for Durand significantly entitled *Discerning God's Justice in Church, Society and Academy*.

Inalienable human dignity

Fifth, the theme of human dignity surfaced time and again in different modes. Consider the emergence of Black consciousness in the 1970s with its affirmation that "Black is beautiful" and its decolonial critique of white consciousness, white supremacy, and white privilege. As Mary Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel (2015:501, also Philander 2019:115) and others observe the black consciousness movement liberated students from internalised notions of inferiority and provided a language to assess social realities theologically. This was spurred on by Allan Boesak's early contributions to Black theology, by ABRECSA, and the influence of the Belydende Kring. The influence of the civil rights movement as led by Martin Luther King was palpable amongst students. A few postgraduate theses address Black theology explicitly (e.g. Du Toit 1989, Nel 1989, Ndalamba 2010, Solomons 2010, see also several essays in Durand 1987).

Add to this the role of discourse on human dignity, on a theological rationale for human rights in the 1980s,[24] on the formation of a human rights culture in the 1990s (see Botman 1994, Botman & Sporre 2003), teaching on human rights and civil society since 2000, numerous conversations and conferences on gendered violence and inequality[25] and on sexual orientation.[26] While the focus was often on the many violations of human dignity and the ambiguous role played by churches in this regard (see Durand & Smit 1988, 1995; Adonis & Smit 1991), the theological intuition remains steadfast, namely that the inalienable dignity of each human being needs to be affirmed with a specific focus on the victims of history. In Denise Ackermann's phrase (1998), there is a need to become more fully human. Desmond Tutu's insistence that the key to the dignity

24 See numerous of the essays in Smit (2007) on human dignity and human rights.

25 See the contributions by Denise Ackermann on human dignity (e.g. 1991, 1998), also Esau (1997), Clowes & Conradie (2003). Violence against women and therefore gender justice has become a major focus of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society (see Lombard & Petersen 215; Lombard, Petersen & Pillay 2016) and subsequently in the work of Sarojini Nadar, noting that this typically also represents a broadening from Christian ethics to Religious Studies.

26 Amongst many other contributions, the Department of Religion and Theology hosted a conference together with Inclusive and Affirming Ministries on "Revisiting Intimacy: The Challenge of Homosexual Relationships in Church and Society" in June 2006. See also the more recent contributions by Megan Robertson and Sarojini Nadar (2020, 2021) on "queering the church".

of the oppressed may well lie in also affirming the dignity of oppressors served a constant reminder. In a saying attributed to Tutu, there is a host of angels that are crying out before every human being: Make way, make way, here comes the image of God![27]

Many modes of liberation

Sixth, liberation theology in its many modes surfaced in conversations at least since the mid-1970s. Such influence was somewhat amorphous and is harder to capture but students read and studied Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology of resistance against fascism (see Botha 1989, Botman 1994, later Dankers 2020), the civil rights movement in the USA and the inspirational example of Martin Luther King Jr.,[28] North American Black theology, especially James Cone (see Swart 1989), Latin American liberation theology, South African theologies of liberation, discourse on women's emancipation and so on and so forth. While liberation has many faces (political, economic, psychological, gendered, ecological), at UWC the focus, at least since 1976 and throughout the 1980s, was on structural violence and especially the repressive violence of the South African government, enforced upon the resistance movements against apartheid, and defended through the ideology of state security. Students, including student leaders from the then Faculty of Theology were deeply involved in such resistance with the rallying cry "Hek toe" to confront the police. Such resistance is perhaps epitomised by the iconic photo of Jaap Durand, the vice-rector at that time, published on the front page of the Cape Times on 28 August 1984. While the police were shooting from Modderdam Road (now Robert Sobukwe) on students, who were fleeing into the campus, an angry Durand turned around and confronted the police in an attempt to stop the shooting.[29]

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27 More recently, this affirmation of human dignity has been related to the critique of Christian anthropocentrism, a debate that remains unresolved. See especially Cloete 2021 and multiple contributions by Conradie in this regard (also 2019, 2020, 2021).

28 As far as I could establish there is no postgraduate thesis by a UWC student on the civil rights movement or Martin Luther King Jr., even though his life and work were studied passionately. Willa Boesak's thesis entitled *God's Wrathful Children* (1995) has a chapter on Malcolm X but not on King.

29 For a discussion of that photo, see Durand's own memoirs in *Protesstem* (2016).

The ideology of state security was addressed especially in the Kairos Document with its critique of "state theology". Somewhat surprisingly, only a few UWC affiliated scholars signed the Kairos Document of 1985/1986.[30] One may also mention Willa Boesak's thesis on "God's Wrathful Children" (1995), and Denise Ackermann's sustained contributions on emancipatory praxis (e.g. 1988, 1993, 1996, 1998). The doctoral thesis of Chris Loff entitled "Bevryding tot Eenwording" ("Liberation towards Unity", 1998) is perhaps symbolic of UWC's approach towards liberation, namely not as an aim in itself but as a necessary step for the sake of something else, in this case ecclesial unity that came partially to fruition in 1994 with the formation of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa. One may also mention the title of Steve de Gruchy's thesis "Not Liberation but Justice" (1992). In later years especially Demaine Solomons has been studying and teaching on Black and liberation theologies (see Solomons, 2010, Solomons & Klaasen 2019, also Engdahl 2017).

Development and social transformation

Seventh, through the work of the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa in the early 1990s (see e.g. Koegelenberg 1992, 1994, 1995, 1996), at that time situated at UWC, and increasingly since 1994, what amounts to a theology of reconstruction gained significance at UWC. While the writings of Jesse Mugambi (1990) and Charles Villa-Vicencio (1992) were studied (see Solomons 2010, Fischer 2015, Cloete 2021), it is the ANC's Reconstruction and Development Programme, neo-liberal deviations from that (through GEAR and NEPAD) and the National Development Plan of 2014 that stirred the interest (see Conradie 2018). Staff members such as John Klaasen (e.g. 2017) and Ignatius Swart together with several students continue to work on themes related to notions of "development".[31] The danger that this may merely amount to a theological legitimation of

30 Amongst staff members at that time only Hannes Adonis and Daan Cloete signed the Kairos Document while alumni such as Leonardo Appies and Nico Botha also signed it. Jaap Durand indicated to me that he would have signed it but given responsibilities in senior management never had the opportunity to do so.

31 Since his appointment at UWC in 2016, see especially Swart & Adogame (2016). See also Solomons (2021).

an upward social mobility, if not a propagation of the prosperity gospel,[32] was recognised. Theological discourse on development is obviously of a multi-disciplinary nature but its theological roots may be located in the so-called moral influence theory of atonement, as the remarkable study and reception of Gustaf Aulén at UWC suggests (see below). The inverse danger is that discourse on development becomes devoid of theological content, becoming purely secular, and is then treated as an ethical or a practical theme. Either way, at UWC the emphasis has typically been on the category of transformation more than reformation or reconstruction (see already Smit 1990, 1993, Botman 1994, also Conradie & Pillay 2014, Conradie & Sakupapa 2017).

The integrity of creation and the whole household of God

Eighth, the ecumenical significance of reflecting on the "integrity of creation" was recognised at UWC in the work of staff and students alike. Here the early contributions of Denise Ackermann on ecological wholeness (see Ackermann & Joyner 1996), of Phil Robinson (1991, 1993) on mission and JPIC, and my own contributions on the integrity of creation (see Conradie 2004, 2010) and on the ecumenical theme of the whole household of God may be mentioned.[33] Other contributions to ecotheology came from Yaw Adu-Gyamfi (e.g. 2011) and Robert Agyarko (e.g. 2013) (both former students and current research fellows), Douglas Lawrie (e.g. 2011), Christo Lombard (see already 1996), Miranda Pillay (2011) and Teddy Sakupapa (e.g. 2012). While such a research focus stimulated several conferences and workshops, and some postgraduate work (e.g. Bailey 2021, Cloete 2021, Sakupapa 2017), it is not clear to what extent this also captured the imagination of theology students. Through international projects

32 One tends to think that contextual theology is epitomised by issues such as corruption, HIV and AIDS, inequality, poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, and the like. Although I have often taught on such issues, a class on Christianity and the critique of consumerism in 2007 stands out for the incessant responses from students. This seemed to be more contextually relevant than all the others! See Conradie (2009) that brought together such class discussions.

33 Each of my major research projects on "Hope for the Earth?", "At home on Earth?" and "The Earth in God's economy" explored the strengths and limitations of the whole household of God as an ecumenical root metaphor. See especially Conradie (2000, 2005, 2007, 2015), also Ayre & Conradie (2016)

on "Christian Faith and the Earth",[34] on "The earth and God's work of creation and redemption",[35] on "Redeeming Sin?"[36] and more recently on "An Earthed Faith: Telling the Story amid the 'Anthropocene'",[37] all registered at UWC, this did place UWC on the map as a global centre of excellence in discourse on Christian ecotheology, with extensive networks for collaboration in place.

Conclusion

Juxtaposing these soteriological concepts with each other explains why there emerged considerable interest in Gustaf Aulén's typology on atonement at UWC (see Jansen 2008, Festus 2008, Agyarko 2010, Brooks 2015, Kondolo 2016, Solomons 2017). A colloquium on "Gustaf Aulén and Christus Victor" was even hosted at Lund University in April 2014 to explore this UWC reception of Aulén (see the edition of *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 95 edited by Engdahl 2019, and the contributions by Conradie 2019, Engdahl 2019, and Solomons 2019). Aulén's Christological typology of views on atonement became translated into pneumatological notions of salvation that helped to cluster together various soteriological metaphors (see Conradie 2010, 2019). In one course on South African soteriologies offered at UWC in 2013 a theology of liberation (symbolised by the Kairos Document) was juxtaposed on this basis with an evangelical theology of reconciliation (symbolised by the Belhar Confession) and a theology of reconstruction (symbolised by the RDP and later the NDP). These soteriological concepts symbolise deeply ingrained theological differences, one may say between a) various forms of liberation theology, b) Lutheran, reformed and evangelical theologies, and c) liberal theologies.

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34 See Conradie, Bergmann, Deane-Drummond & Edwards (2014) and the special edition of *Scriptura* entitled "Christian Faith and the Earth: Respice et Prospice", 111:309–311, 312–432, including an article by Teddy Sakupapa (2012).

35 See the volumes edited by Conradie (2011, 2012) as well as two monographs (2013, 2015).

36 See especially Cloete 2014, 2021; Conradie 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020.

37 This is an envisaged series of twelve edited volumes on various aspects of the content and significance of the Christian faith. See Conradie & Lai (2022, forthcoming).

Such differences are not readily overcome and are often radically in conflict with each other. Consider the Kairos Document's critique of reconciliation, the debate between orthodoxy and modernism and between liberation and liberal theologies. Nevertheless, one may say that UWC students and staff intuitively recognise the appeal of each of these three soteriologies, despite their obvious differences. Individuals may differ on where they put weight but, like a juggler, they typically seek ways of keeping all the cones in the air. Perhaps that is indeed the distinct contribution of UWC to doing theology in (South) Africa.

There may well be a decolonial intuition here. As a survival strategy the colonised people of the Cape had to learn to live with apparently irreconcilable differences, perhaps best characterised by some "hidden transcripts" and a "spirituality of inbetweenness" (Cloete 1999) – being descendants of colonisers and the colonised, masters and slaves, Christians and Muslims, "whites", "Blacks", the Khoi and other Indigenous peoples, Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa, capitalism and socialism, ANC and NP/DA politics, some fairly affluent, many desperately poor. Radical either/or choices are often neither expedient nor wise given family networks, while radical distortions (heresies) still need to be recognised and resisted. This may well be why the University of the Western Cape has survived and is able to flourish despite so many ongoing challenges.

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