

Gateway to the future ... *oopmaak van die hekke* ... Transformation in the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria

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The only constant in theological education is change, despite brave attempts to hold the tide back in some quarters. Yet, Western-based theological education remains the norm globally. The Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria exemplifies this norm despite its commitment to Africanisation. This article will consider transformation through the lens of the leadership of Prof. Johan Buitendag, who has led the transformation initiative from his own shared leadership perspective as dean since 2010. Change in the faculty will be analysed through analysis of the faculty plans, with particular reference to teaching, learning and research. Consideration will be given to a more radical proposal for future transformation under the initiative of Africanisation.

Introduction

It took studying at the University of Pretoria (UP) for me to appreciate my Blackness and the history it comes from. It was through being challenged by Prof. _____ and Prof. _____ that I began to ask myself 'what does it mean to be black in a world that is defined through biases and subjective thoughts?' And so I submit that this journey is one of self-discovery, painful, full of struggle but mostly about the restoration of human dignity and the realisation that the Gospel is not exclusive but is for the masses, bringing all to the core of God's love ... No sermon in Africa can ever be given if it does not reflect its context. #proudtukkie #theologian #black african. (Kabelo Motlhakane, 15 February 2016)

These words speak more eloquently of the achievement of the Faculty of Theology (FT) than the many documents produced at the UP regarding the essence and nature of the educational enterprise we are involved in – not that they do not communicate, but they do not take account of the singular effect on individual and group achievement. This is about transformation – an incomplete task – radical change from the roots. It is the equivalent of reconciliation:

a gift from God which Christians have the responsibility to share with the world ... the vertical dimension of reconciliation is defined by our relationship to God. The horizontal dimension is reflected in the social rapport amongst peoples, making reconciliation the cornerstone for all societies seeking a peaceful co-existence. (Atzvi 2013:30)

It involves the totality of human existence – God, oneself, others and the environment. It involves all faiths. It is 'an imperative for conscious social intervention in order to promote processes of restoring justice and renewed relationships' (Nordstekke 2013:117). It is totally inclusive and involves the social, economic and political realms of life in order that liberation and justice become the preconditions for transformation. Hence, it offers the promise of a 'reconciled diversity' (Atzvi 2013:34) as an enhancing dimension of life achieved through 'processes of dialogue, mutual learning and understanding which cultivate a spirit of respect and inclusiveness, with the ultimate wish to ensure a peaceful and reconciled co-existence'. In sum, this encapsulates the aim and purpose of theological education. The future of theological education in faculties of theology in South Africa is uncertain to say the least. The FT at the UP focusses annually on its purpose, aims and objectives. This is discussed at the annual faculty *lekgotla* and thereafter is the responsibility of the dean and his executive (heads of departments and directors of centres).

Prof. Johan Buitendag

Prof. Johan Buitendag has been dean of the FT since 2010 and is in his second term of office. Prior to that, he was head of the Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics. His views on the role of theology in a university are expressed in the keynote address he presented on 8 November 2014 at the 69th Graduation Ceremony of the Trinity Theological Seminary in Legon (Ghana). There he committed to a multi- and transdisciplinary approach within the context of a university in which

theology has a unique contribution to offer. He acknowledges that for a long time South Africa was isolated as a civilised and civilising European enclave in Africa, with little positive or constructive contact with our African neighbours. He focusses on the individual within a community:

The human person is to be understood in terms of an eco-cultural environment which can neither be pure subjective nor pure objective. God is to be discerned in creation and revelation, as around, above, within and even beyond us. (Buitendag 2014:2)

This demonstrates the need for a theological approach integrated within an interdependent holistic approach to life:

that theology is in her deepest sense an endeavour to understand reality and that theology not only can, but must collaborate with other sciences to this end. Theology can indeed contribute to come to grips with reality. Ecclesial and scientific accountability is a *sine qua non* for responsible theological education. (Buitendag 2014:2)

Buitendag draws on Newman, who posited that a university is not an institution, but an *idea*. Knowledge is there for its own sake and purpose and the ideal of universal knowledge is its driving force (Newman 1982:74–92). This is consonant with Torrance's view that:

the role of the university as the pursuit of truth should not be compromised. A university should be a *universitas*, a community of disciplined research pursuing an open universal aim through a multiplicity of interests, theology included. (Torrance 1985:52)

And this requires a unitary view of the universe (Torrance 1985:59) where the:

pursuit of truth ... enables qualitative and rigorous enquiry ... is free from extraneous control and able to function within an atmosphere of stability and serenity. Above all, the university must pursue research in all areas of human knowledge in such a way that they open the way for interconnectedness. (Seed 2015:195)

Theology is an integral branch of this universal knowledge, because all knowledge forms one whole or 'circle', from which the various branches of learning stem. Religious truth is not only an aspect but a condition of general knowledge (Buitendag 2014:3). Hence, theology could play a valuable role in contributing to the 'interrelatedness of creation, enabling the idea of a *universitas* to be realised in a spiritual cultural unity that is open to the intelligibility and integrity of the universe (Seed 2015:196, referring to Torrance 1985:62).

Since Newman's time, the idea of a university has moved from the interpretation of reality to the transformation of reality. Buitendag insists that such an approach must be grounded in pragmatic research, economic demands, health sciences and ecological crisis. However, the driving forces of universities today are *reputation, impact, success and funding*.

Buitendag supports Andrew Louth, who says that this undermines the idea of the university as a place of intellectual virtue and contemplation, as universities are being converted into educational businesses where academics must deliver and their produce must be marketable and subject to quality control:

This is the rationale of quality assurance assessments and research assessment exercises: we produce education, which is consumed by students, and research, consumed by our peers and these things can be quantified and assessed. (Louth 2004:75)

Buitendag (2014:5) favours the idea of a *multiversity* for:

There are multiple perspectives and all understanding could contribute to comprehend reality. Not one science alone is capable to provide a whole picture of reality. Cooperation and consultation should be 360° in the round ... Theology should be in *critical dialogue* with different sciences, interacting with other disciplines on its own terms.

The report on the Quality Assurance of Netherlands Universities (QANU 2012) stated the following important perspective on the place of theology at a university:

It is important for theology to be present in secular universities. It has a very positive role to play in providing reflective enquiry into fundamental questions of human nature and existence, and in exploring the approaches to those questions with in [*sic*] one or more major and historically crucial religious traditions. Theology has therefore to be conserved as an autonomous discipline with its own theory-building and methodology, independently of the external approach of religion by religious studies and of its more instrumental use for ministerial training, and also irrespective of the commitment to church policies. (p. 9)

This means that theology within the university has to be open to ecclesial partnerships and that the church, in turn, has to be receptive to scientific inquiry and subject of course to ongoing revision and reflection.

However, Buitendag is clearly aware that:

[s]ome African scholars are very convinced that Western theology has 'lost the plot' when it comes to authentically articulating the Christian faith as seen in the 'centre of gravity' that has shifted from the North to the South. (Balcomb 2013:580)

This is the weakest point of his argument, because it is probably the majority of African scholars who subscribe to Balcomb's view and verification can be sought. However, Buitendag (2014) is confident that:

The spirit of Africa and the worldview of the people of this great continent are so much more holistic and faith-based that I really believe that scientific theology will survive the dangerous route between the Scylla and the Charybdis (of fideism and secularism). (p. 12)

This is the approach he has encouraged in the FT as a way forward.

More recently, Buitendag (2017 forthcoming) has turned his thinking to the future, based on a solid evaluation of the past, and concludes that in the:

classical paradigm the Faculty finds its identity and relevance. It is a recognition of its diachronically rootedness in the Western tradition of scholarly education ... the world ranking of universities has opened up a new challenge and even a niche for a new approach to Theology in the 21st century. I will

do it in such a way that the 'Pretoria Model' is given a new dimension and perhaps defines the nature of theology at UP for the time to come.

In pursuing this model, Buitendag will have to be clear about what is specifically unique regarding the 'Pretoria model', which has hitherto based its excellence in competing with the rest of Africa and with its own high standards. To enter the global market despite its already high rankings may not be in the best interests of its African context.

Buitendag follows in and epitomises a long hallowed tradition of a Western grounded approach to theological education. His prime markers are inclusivity and diversity, which are key values of the South African Constitution, the UP and its FT. Strategic alliances are key to the future of his vision, focussed on internationalisation and Africanisation. With regard to Africanisation, which is the responsibility of the dean, it is not clear exactly what is meant by this contested term and what it encompasses within the FT. This is considered in depth below.

Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria

The FT at UP is 'engaged in an evolutionary process ... It has developed into a multi-ecclesial faculty ... Typical of a 21st century paradigm, the Faculty finds its identity in diversity and close partnerships and ecumenism becomes the nature of the Faculty' (FP 2013:194). It has made a distinctive move from 'exclusivism to greater inclusivism' (FP 2013:198).

The mission and vision statements of UP are as follows:

Vision: To be a leading research-intensive university in Africa, recognised internationally for its quality, relevance and impact, as also for developing people, creating knowledge and making a difference locally and globally.

Mission: In pursuing recognition and excellence in its core functions of research, teaching and learning, and integrating engagement with society and communities into these, the University of Pretoria will use quality, relevance, diversity and sustainability as its navigational markers.

Values:

The members of the University of Pretoria believe that: our community of scholars must be founded on the pursuit of knowledge through research, teaching and learning, with membership acquired on the basis of intellectual merit, ability and the potential for excellence; and that differing perspectives, arising from diverse backgrounds and histories that define our identities, deepen scholarly inquiry and enrich academic debate. We cherish: academic freedom, creative and innovative thought, ethical standards and integrity, accountability and social justice; and our staff and students as the University's core asset.

We foster: an inquiry-led and evidence-based approach to creating knowledge; and academic citizenship, whereby we commit ourselves to harnessing our intellectual abilities in the interest of our nation and humanity.

We recognise that:

in a resource-constrained world where vast disparities remain, the University must endeavour to produce graduates who appreciate the importance of community service, entrepreneurial endeavours and innovative actions in generating employment and development in our local communities. (UP 2011b:5)

The mission and vision statements of the FT state:

Vision: To be a faculty recognised for its creative engagement with life-giving theology and religious insight, of service to academia, church and community.

Mission: To achieve this, we commit ourselves to –

- Providing relevant theological and religious education;
- Nurturing transformative leaders;
- Quality research;
- Promoting justice, peace, the integrity of creation and a reconciling diversity;
- Engaging people on the margins of society. (FP 2011:4)

FT values are critical thinking, intellectual excellence, transformational praxis and inclusivity.

These two statements demonstrate the alignment between faculty and university. From this, the FT assumes, but does not claim, its African context. Within the FT, each department's mission and vision statements align with the faculty and university statements. These statements inform and guide the development of the faculty plans (FP). Key success factors were identified:

- aligning the composition of the Faculty with the vision of the University and our values
- forging broad-based relationships and alliances that create a sense of cooperation and co-ownership and are conducive to life-giving theology
- an integrated student body
- environmental engagement
- overarching Faculty management. (FP 2011:4)

The profile of the nature and composition of the FT is seen as the most significant issue requiring attention in terms of the relationship between FT and church and attention to its client base (FP 2011:4–5).

The FT is unique in having a majority of postgraduate students, emphasising its commitment to teaching and learning and research. During the 2010 FT *lekgotla*, a number of issues were noted. Firstly, the FT had achieved a surplus of R20, 614, 981 (cf. the 2010 figure of R14 782 866). Secondly, there was a dramatic decrease in international students. The average for 2006–2009 was 111. In 2010 this dropped to 87. Thirdly, with regard to student demographic trends, the FT was clearly a

research-based institution, with double the number of postgraduate students compared with undergraduates. Male students formed a substantial majority (average for 2007–2010, 3:1). The same period witnessed an 11% rise in black student numbers (269–303), with a 17% rise in student registrations. During this period the numbers of students coming from partner churches remained stable, while the number coming from non-affiliated churches rose. Fourthly, staff demographic trends indicate an academic staff totally comprised of doctors, three having a National Research Foundation (NRF) rating. There is a disproportionate partner church staff compared with the total student population.

Two main risks were identified. One was the risk of losing a church partner if such a partner were no longer able to identify with the nature and/or composition of the faculty. The other was the strong possibility of staff burnout through lack of adequate support. This provides the context for what follows.

The core business of the faculty

Teaching and learning

From 2008 it was envisaged that curriculum change would accommodate the changing environment, the needs of first-year students and the requirements of the Higher Education Qualification Framework. The process was managed in accordance with the *Teaching and Learning priorities for 2011: Advancing Excellence in undergraduate Education at UP*. The existing programmes underwent revision with the change from modular to semester courses, by combination and new design with addition of two new year-long courses, Theological Orientation (TEO 101, TEO 102) and Biblical Background (BYA 101, BYA 102). Six interdisciplinary modules were introduced and modules were (re)designed, taking account of the (South) African context and African and black theology to an extent. Advice would be taken from appropriate lecturers on advancing this process (FP 2011:16), particularly from 2013 when the first cohort of students completed their degrees. The progress of these modules was monitored by the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee. This oversight facilitated the withdrawal of uneconomic modules. In addition, the identification of students with potential to undertake postgraduate studies was identified as an important task.

The ClickUP system had been adopted in some modules as part of the inquiry-led, blended and e-learning system. The large number of inter-university agreements makes for frequent use of postgraduate opportunities. An Ecumenical Advisory Board, made up of representatives from partner churches, advises on 'the content and quality of theological training' (FP 2011:15). Major priorities are monitoring the quality of new modules, enhancing the first-year experience and introducing a blended model for teaching and learning (T&L). A significant aim was to introduce translation services 'to promote the greater integration of students of different races and cultures in the classroom' (FP 2011:15) during their first year. By the end of 2011 it was reported that:

'These services are currently experienced positively by the first-year students, especially because of the diversity it creates in the classroom context' (FP 2013:206). Prior to this, close cooperation took place between the FT and the Department of Education Innovation (EI), and the provision of study guides for each module became a requirement. Cooperation agreements with African and other universities were to be developed. Pass rates had deteriorated somewhat but were still higher (86.4%) than the UP average (80.1%). By 2011, it had increased to 88.8%. At-risk students were to be identified. The Centre for Contextual Ministry (CCM) was identified for incorporation into the faculty. During 2010, four new C1 positions were allocated to the FT, which altered both the racial mix and church partner proportion of the teaching staff.

An issue that had not received sufficient attention was the improvement of the teaching abilities of lecturers (FP 2011:18). At the time of writing (2016), this is only now being taken into account with the requirement to produce a teaching portfolio for promotion applications (UP, 2010a:7).

The new Bachelor of Theology (BTh) programme was introduced in 2010 and the Bachelor of Arts (BA Theol) and diploma in Theology in 2011 to allow for close monitoring of the modules, especially in the first year. The target for the use of ClickUP was set at 70%. (it was not met – 68.45%; FP 2013:201). The use of blended learning was intensified, as was the use of study guides. Academic literacy tests were introduced for the first year and formal modules were to be introduced in 2013 (ALL 110, 120, 114, 124). Support from EI was intensified between 2009 and 2012. The existing orientation programme was extended to 2 weeks to offer more support to new students, and student assessment of lecturers was used to assist lecturers. Dropout rates in the first year at this time were higher than the UP average as a result of students who could not access their faculty of choice registering for the Diploma in Theology (which is the only undergraduate diploma qualification [with lower entrance requirements] offered by UP – 8.8% (UP) cf. 19.2% (FT); FP 2012:88).

The FT introduced the UP Student Academic Development and Excellence Model from 2012 to 2016 in order to track the performance of students undertaking high impact modules, with which students often struggle (i.e. TEO 110, 120, BYA 110, 120). This was an integral part of the drive to improve the first-year experience – 'First-years matter' – along with the introduction of tutor support, while first-year lecturers were required to use the Grade Centre on ClickUP and the Early Alert System. For this EI support was provided.

From 2012, the evaluation of progress was based on the UP Core Performance Indicators. For the most part, the FT excelled in its achievement. However, the attrition rate of first-year students continued to be a matter of concern, and steps were taken through the use of UP CARES (continuous alert, referral and engagement system) to reduce this to

8% by 2013 (FP 2012:164–165). By 2011 it had dropped to 7.6%. Alongside this the implementation of the new curricula continued. The use of translation services was continued to promote ‘greater integration of students of different races and cultures in the classroom’ (FP 2012:167).

The year 2012 also saw the introduction of two community engagement modules (PFN 310/CYE 210/214 and PFN 410/CYE 310/314) that contribute to the embedding of community engagement in the T&L programmes. Another helpful innovation introduced during 2012 was the Senate approval of the *Graduate Attributes* document to assist faculties in planning and assessing their T&L and assessment practice. These included the ability:

to function autonomously and confidently, have intellectual curiosity and an enquiry led approach to knowledge, be emerging or established leaders in their professions, be emerging or established leaders in their respective professions who are team players able to conceptualise and synthesise knowledge creatively so as to find solutions to challenges, have a sense of responsibility and to be able to communicate constructively in all possible situations. (FP 2013:203)

From 2013, the FT embarked on a project to ‘green’ the faculty as part of its commitment to the emerging Faculty Research Theme (FRT). During the year the faculty T&L Committee undertook to revise the BTH and BA curricula. Only minor changes were proposed or adopted, while the study material was formalised and the programmes continued. This could be considered as a year of consolidation.

The idea of a Faculty of Religion and Theology was first mooted in 2014 with an additional Department of Biblical and Religion Studies. The aim was to promote diversity, inter-religious dialogue, tolerance and mutual respect (FP 2014:296–297). The faculty identifies with the QANU report (2013):

Theology has, therefore, to be conserved as an autonomous discipline with its own theory – building and methodology, independently of the external approach of religion by religious studies and of its more instrumental use for ministerial training, and also irrespective of the commitment to church policies. (p. 8)

Work began on an internal reorganisation of the theological disciplines into clusters – foundations (Old Testament and New Testament), beliefs (Dogmatics and Church History and/or Polity) and practices (Practical Theology and Missiology). Advances were made by the requirement of modules on ClickUP to progressively incorporate elements of a blended T&L model employing face-to-face teaching, multimedia, continuous assessment, e-learning and community engagement with the ultimate aim of producing the established graduate attributes. The aim was to engage students in their learning process and encourage deep learning. This was supported by an intensified first-year orientation programme, ‘First-years matter’. Postgraduate programmes were aligned with the new requirements of the national Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) levels.

Research

Research has always occupied an exemplary place in the field of Theology in South Africa (see FP 2014:313–315, 326). The FT at UP leads the field in this regard, and the faculty is clearly a research-intensive unit. The FT, with 100% research-active researchers (in 2011 the UP average was 86.2% active researchers), consistently maintains a place where its research output is greater than the combined output of all the other faculties: ‘The weighted average article output *per capita* of an academic of the FT is 5.55 units compared with 0.67 units for the rest of the University’ (FP 2011:23); it was 6.4 in 2010 (FP 2012:169). Research units credited for several years attest to the increasing performance. (this has been linked to its commitment to develop and foster a research-based approach [inquiry-based] from the first year of undergraduate studies [2007 – 134.17; 2008 – 117.08; 2009 – 119.17; 2010 – 108.8; FP 2011:23, 168]). This is monitored and supported by research methodology courses offered at the appropriate levels. The FT committed itself to work alongside the UP research themes where possible, with ‘a unique theme, maximum international/international impact, interdisciplinary nature, part of the university’s transformation agenda, local relevance, and international participation’ (FP 2011:21). To this is added Africanisation, a contested term, with varying interpretations and implications (Horsthemke 2004, 2009; Maile 2011:111; Maluleke 2010:371). While there has been a marked decrease in postgraduate registrations, there has been a growing increase in research outputs. The work of the Centre for Contextual Theology was integrated into the faculty and its work was aligned with the Department of Practical Theology. The Centre for Public Theology is also involved in pursuing the research focus of the faculty. The FT is well placed in this regard, having two internationally recognised journals, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* (HTS) [ISI rated] and *Verbum et Ecclesia* (VE). In addition, from 2011, the FT has steadily increased its numbers of NRF-rated scholars. By 2013, the FT ‘had exceeded the expectation of NRF researchers. A target was set for 2013 and a figure of nine was realised. The percentage of 37.5% not only exceeds the faculty target of 30.4% for 2013, but it is far better than the 19.28% average for the university’ (FP 2014:316). FT’s commitment to community engagement was recognised in the award of THRIP and Sanpad grants for Dr. A.S. van Niekerk’s Centre for Sustainable Communities on healthcare and energy use in townships (FP 2012:104). The 2013 FP (212) notes a significant turnover of senior staff members through retirement with no significant drop in research output. The faculty monitors quality and impact as a priority. By 2010, the faculty had published more than 50% of its outputs in ISI-rated journals. This increased to almost 64% in 2011. The next advance was in the publication of more articles in international journals. *HTS* is the most prominent journal in South Africa, with an H index impact factor of 3 for 2011 (FP 2013:213). The income from competitive research grants and contracts increased accordingly; thus, with the additional income from research publications and the churches, the FT financial position was further consolidated. In 2012, there was a surplus of R43 100 000 prior to contribution to overheads (FP 2014:360). In 2014, the FRT

was designated as *Ecodomy – life in its fullness*. This would link with several of the institutional research themes and would be promoted through an international conference in 2014.

Africanisation

Throughout this period, the FT has been conscious of being a theological centre in Africa, with a somewhat different history from the rest of Africa, yet no less affected by the twin hegemonic pillars of colonialism and imperialism. This is inevitably linked with transformation. Naidoo (2016) makes it clear that:

The debate on Africanisation has developed because of the larger discourse on the transformation of higher education; to undo decades of injustice caused by apartheid. The transformation of universities involves major academic, intellectual and philosophical arguments about whose knowledge to teach, learn and research. These discourses are made up of issues around curriculum reform, internationalisation, the role of higher education in a newly democratic country and the issue of Africanisation (Letsekha 2013:1). With regard to the local curriculum, there is a renewed focus on indigenous knowledge and an African community competing in a global society. (Williams & Gardner 2012:215)

The faculty has been responding to this in various ways. At the UP level, the first of 10 Strategies Performance Indicators state clearly: 'To be a leading research intensive university in Africa' (UP Academic Plan, Appendix 1: Academic vision | goals, targets and performance indicators 2012:26). At the 'local' level, the UP Strategic Plan notes: 'Persisting social and economic inequalities South Africa as gateway into Africa and partner in global South (e.g. BRICS)' (UP Strategic Plan, Local – particular challenges and imperatives 2011a:4).

Within the FT, an important aspect of the forward planning of the faculty is related to strategic alliances and internationalisation. These are separate issues, although Africanisation is considered a sub-interest of internationalisation: 'Africanisation is an important part of the faculty's vision for internationalisation' (FP 2013:216). Internationalisation relates to networking outside Africa. Africanisation is specific in its delimitation as a contributor to the educational arena. Antonio states (2006) that Africanisation suggests:

... why education was such a critical site of contestation during and after colonial rule: it is within education that categories of thought were formally defined and the conditions for the articulation of colonised subjects were laid down and strategies for colonised minds were deployed. (p. 19)

Botha (2010:201) suggests that 'internationalisation ... states the more a university chooses to Africanise the less it can internationalise, and vice versa'. What does this mean within the FT? Although it is 'deemed as a priority', only R50 000 was allocated in 2012. Active collaboration exists with seminaries in Zambia, Cameroon (where it was hoped to establish an annual exchange programme with Kumba University, though this has not yet borne fruit) and Congo, and contacts with African academics extend over a much broader front. It is also

the intention to liaise with and accredit African seminaries and their programmes. Since 2012, the Department of Practical Theology has been cooperating on a research project, and a course on leadership capacity development has been co-presented with the *Institut Supérieur de Pédagogie Religieuse* in Kinshasa, DRC (FP 2014:328). The commitment to establish a faculty residence for postgraduate African theologians (RESPAT) has not yet materialised (it is now projected for 2017) despite the projection that the availability of such a facility could deliver three PhD graduates *per annum*. In 2014, a plan was developed to establish a centre for African spirituality with an international scholar as director. This is still in process at the time of writing.

However, there are several inter-university initiatives afoot in the field of Continentalisation, that is Africanisation. An academic and ecclesiastic network (NetAct) of theologians in South Africa and academics in Angola, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Rwanda grows year by year. The publication of academic articles in African languages such as Sepedi contributes to the values of diversity and inclusivity adopted by the faculty (FP 2016:12). This is linked to the wider vision of the FT:

This faculty – to be renamed into *Faculty of Theology and Religion* – together with this new department may take the initiative to provide the foundation for a *UP Centre on Religion and Society* in which other faculties will be able to participate. Co-operation is envisaged with Faculties such as Law, Education, Economics and Management Sciences, and Humanities. The strategic importance of establishing this new department and may be in forming not only the UP centre but in drafting an *African Academy on Religion and Society* in co-operation with other Universities such as University of Cape Town, University of the Free State, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, and other African institutions. (UP, External Review 2015a:5)[emphasis in original]

There is a certain awareness within the FT that we live in a complex and troubled context:

'We have a challenged society,' to quote one of the Heads of Department: That is Africa's biggest problem and we must help to solve this.' In this respect, the faculty's management and several Heads of Department are eager to broaden the focus from Christianity to a wider range of world religions, in South Africa especially represented by Islam and Hinduism, and to engage open learning. (UP External Review 2015a:9)

With regard to transformation, a Transformation Committee was established in the faculty, which is representative of all stakeholders. In a traditionally Reformed faculty this, of course, would be expected as a result of its commitment to the *semper reformanda* ('constantly in the process of reforming') principle. The future agenda for transformation consists of:

Creating a common understanding of the UP 2025 vision and the Journey for Change imperative
Sharing perceptions of barriers and enablers to diversity at UP
Understanding the benefits of lived diversity (academic and social)
Creating a climate of improved race relations and understanding the negative impact of prejudice. (FP 2016:21)
The ... Faculty has been transformed to an entity, which has adapted to the global, national and local environments that it

renders service to. Without doubt it is sustainable for the foreseeable future, primarily because of its recognition as a Faculty of academic excellence. (FP 2016:25)

This appears more like an improvement plan than a transformation plan. Despite all that has been initiated and achieved in Africanisation, there is a clear lack of coherence, which opens up a significant vista for future development.

Gateway to the future ... *oopmaak van die hekke ...*

The major issue facing theology at the UP as it works towards the future is the transformation of the faculty from a Eurocentric entity into an African faculty. This is controversial because FT prestige depends to a great degree on how we fare in the various world ranking systems rather than seeking to realise our full potential in Africa, our natural habitat. However, further than that, we operate with the false assumption that the Western context is static. Yet, it inhabits a post-Christendom society that 'calls for a reconfiguration of Western theological discourse' (Nikolajsen 2015:196) and needs to develop appropriate theological discourse in support of such a church. UP retains the traditional Western reality of a theology faculty with a veneer of Africanisation. The metaphor of two trees may be helpful here. One tree is an oak tree seasoned by centuries of nutrients provided by its natural English habitat and well adapted to the South African context. For example, at Lovedale Missionary Institution oaks were planted to commemorate the visit of Queen Victoria's son, Prince Arthur, during the 1850s. James Stewart (1894:100), principal of Lovedale, wrote: 'These and many other English trees ... thrive well. The English oak has found a new home in South Africa'. The oak yields little apart from acorns and its material self, which occasions its self-destruction. It is well and deeply rooted and no storm or natural disaster can uproot it. It has transported well globally and has adapted well in its host habitats. It will endure for centuries to come unless it is chopped down, dies of millennial old age or is attacked by postcolonial 'foreign bodies' within its African colonised context. It has undergone many threats in the context of empire and renewed empire, yet it still reigns supreme confident of the righteousness of its cause. It is surrounded by the exotica of the host and other countries – beautiful fynbos, aloes and proteas – which aid its stability and endurance. In theological terms these are the exotica of theology – liberation, feminist, public, contextual, African, womanist, water buffalo, minyung, political, black and a host of other theologies, all of which are critiqued for not being authentic theology. Yet, there was a time when Western theology was itself a form of exotica.

Now let us consider the other tree, the baobab, the 'upside-down tree', birthed and nourished in Africa. Baobabs store water in the trunk to endure the harsh drought conditions particular to each region in which they are found. They are well adapted to their environment. They provide food, fibre, dye, crafts and homes for birds. There are no clearly demarcated annual growth rings compared with the oak tree, for the essence of the baobab is deep penetration. Yet, even in

Africa it is considered an exotic tree by many indigenous people, partly because the oak tree has been promoted as the universal symbol of permanence. A comparison of these two representative entities is related to how we approach transformation. We do not import water from England to water our tree of English derivation. It has long ago adapted to accepting African water, and yet it remains an oak tree. So it is with theological education in Africa – Western in *esse* yet fed by indigenous sources, as is African religion.

The study of African theology that was ecologically based was the initiative of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa missionary Rev. Henry Rowley, who in 1867 argued that African traditional religion (ATR) could be a bridge for the conversion of Africans to Christianity (cf. Schoffeleers 1987). For Rowley, ATR could provide the basis on 'which to build the Christian common faith, a sure and better way of making them Christians than totally ignoring all they know as useless, superstitious and everlastingly preaching to them' (Rowley 1867:222). The study of religion in Africa is not new, since it has been provided in African tertiary education since 1947 and included the biblical subjects and ATR (Walls 2014:12). Parrinder (2000:5) defined ATR at that time. It was not 'taken as isolated from the rest of the world or scorned as mere fetishism or superstition, but as having its own traditions and history, even where unwritten, and with its social and personal characteristics'. It is important to note that there is not one definition of *African*, and it needs to be defined by Africans themselves within their own context taking account of 'the massive diversity in Africa and the multiplicity of ways of being African' (Duncan 2000:29) and being religiously African:

Africanisation is not merely a form of cultural romanticism or a form of cultural nationalism but will need to involve a critical appraisal of African traditions and cultures against the criteria of their liberational import. (Maluleke 2006:73)

In spatial perspective, as the subject developed within the academy, it became clear that 'many of the ideas, beliefs, institutions, assumptions and practices' of primal religion (Walls 2014:15) are common in America, South-East Asia, China, and the Pacific. Its religious systems are not uniquely African but are to a large degree universal, meaning that African religious and cultural insights may have a relevance far wider than the African continent. This is available through the designation of 'primal religions', which are historically prior to historical religions and contain the basic elements of religion in the relationship between peoples and the transcendent world (Fotland 2014:105; cf. Taylor 1963, 26, 27). Bediako had already claimed that 'Europe shares with Africa a pre-Christian primal religious heritage' (1994:248; cf. Fotland 2014:107,108). Taylor (1963:33) claims that 'the world church is impoverished and incomplete without the insights that the Logos has been preparing for it in Africa'. The role of primal religion that Paas (2016:26) misunderstands and misrepresents is sometimes challenged, but even Paas himself (2016:84) admits that Greek philosophy was a preparation for European Christianity, so why should global primal religion not be accepted as a preparation for African Christianity?

In historical perspective, it is now apparent that God revealed Godself to Africans prior to their exposure to Jesus Christ. This has challenged those who believe that no good can emerge from Africa. Tshehla (2014:61) urges 'African thought leaders to soberly present appropriate evidence and interpretation ... which cannot be justifiably ignored', while Bediako (1990:5-7) asserts that: 'the form of religion once held to be the furthest removed from the Christian faith has had a closer relationship with it than any other'. Bediako himself made 'fresh and original contributions, to risk dislodgement from benefactors who have prescribed the perimeters of acceptable African thought, and speak primarily within the terms of reference prescribed by one's indigenous philosophy and worldview, even as these frankly engage Jesus Christ' (Tshehla 2014:62). Commenting on Bediako's work, Walls (2008) claims that:

The second-century question was the possibility of being both Christian and Greek, the twentieth-century question was the possibility of being both Christian and African. We are made by our past; it is our past that creates our identity and shows us who we are. We cannot abandon or suppress our past or substitute something else instead, nor can our past be left as it is, untouched by Christ. ... Today's quest is the conversion of African culture, and perhaps thereby its renewal. (p. 189)

He agrees with Bediako that 'the needs of the African world require a view of Christ that meets those needs' (Bediako 1990:10) and affirms that 'African theology was not an exotic minority specialisation but an essential component in a developing global discourse' (Walls 2008:193). Walls (2014) takes this notion of a significant reorientation even further:

It is becoming increasingly evident that the theology that emanates from the learned institutions of the West is simply not big enough for Africa and Asia; it does not interact with issues of fundamental importance there; it has nothing to say on many matters that are critically important to African and Asian Christian believers. The universe that it addresses is the small scale universe of the Enlightenment. (p. 16)

Kaoma (2015a:9) observes from an African perspective on ecotheology:

The failure to acknowledge the manifestation of high gods and ancestors in nature can be blamed on African theology, which is hooked to Western theology. Apart from expecting African theology to reflect Western theology and language, the global North remains the centre of Christian theology, missiology and ethics. One can safely argue that the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted to the global South, but theology has not. To be a theologian, one is expected to study Western theology and ethics. Subsequently, theologies from the non-Western worlds are qualified (Asian moral theology, Latin America moral theology, African moral theology etc.), while Western theologies enjoy normative positions in global Christianity. For instance, American, British German and other global North scholars do *Christian theology*, while non-Western and non-white scholars are qualified – Asian, African theologians etc. No wonder themes and symbols that do not reflect Western theological promises are understudied. (p. 9)

This is not merely an intellectual exercise, for within the field of *ecodomy*, failure to reflect and act 'will lead to extreme poverty, further conflicts and political instability' (Kaoma 2015a:19) that result from the conviction that 'capitalism deceives us into believing that we are the only players in the cosmic race. However, we are part of creation and not creation *per se*' (Kaoma 2015a:18-19). This clearly means that African theology itself is 'infected' by Western theology; further, transformation will involve a deep-seated inner revolution when all the externals are already available.

Transformation is about radical change, not a tinkering with *adiaphora*: 'Conform no longer to the pattern of this present world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds. Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable and perfect' (Rom 12:2). Lesslie Newbigin (1968:8) made the Christian position very clearly: 'Christians ... are revolutionaries. They believe that structures can be and have to be changed, and that no structure, however venerable ... has absolute authority'. What is required is that we make the cognitive, intellectual, cultural and spiritual transition from the oak tree of England to the baobab tree of Africa in theological terms; this means 'upside-downing' our theology. The new curricula for the BDiv and BTh degrees were introduced in 2010 and 2011. Phase one introduced the venter of Africanisation, but the European-based philosophical underpinning remains intact. Naidoo (2016) asserts that the 'dominant curriculum continues to be a source of alienation' within Africa. Any change built on this base simply maintains the *status quo*. In terms of theological education Africa needs to 'get in step with Christianity as an African religion *at an epistemological level*' (Balcomb 2014:72; cf. 74-75). A clear and distinctive shift needs to be made toward a philosophy grounded in African wisdom for 'forced confrontations as between the traditional African religio-cultural heritage and contemporary Christianity and/or Islam are untenable' (Tshehla 2014:63). Curriculum development has to deal with the hegemony and normativity of Western-birthed theology despite our reiterations that all theology is contextual. Even in the west and north, Western theology has lost its edge. With regard to the impact of globalisation, Gillian Bediako (2014), reflecting Kwame Bediako's thinking, comments:

this is not translating into an acceptance of Western value-setting for the Christian religion in the rest of the world ... not only is the [W]estern theological academy unable to commend the Christian faith to its own Western context, but it also has increasing difficulty in understanding the world [of] Christianity beyond the West. (p. 362)

This appears as a global crisis of confidence in the normativity of Western Christianity.

The starting point for transformation should be the (South) African and similar contexts. For instance, some years ago Hans Kung (1980) posed the question 'Does God exist?' (Kung 1980). Why is our theology beset by this question? Is this an issue in the African context compared with famine, drought, poverty, militarisation, war, internecine conflict,

corruption, HIV and AIDS? For Africans the question is rhetorical. Other questions predominate. Now is the time for a deeper penetration of Africa into Africa if the Africanisation and/or transformation process is to be marked by authenticity and integrity. Guiding principles in such a paradigm change are suggested by Carpenter (2014:125–129): the reintegration of theological disciplines, reconstructing of systematic theology, re-grounding theological discourse, re-engaging other ideologies and traditions and renewing the theological mind. To these might be added recognising ‘primal spirituality’ (Fotland 2014:116) as a universal spirituality and the prioritising of eco-justice. After 40 years of experience in the Ghanaian Akrofi-Christaller Centre for postgraduate studies, Bediako (2014:363) proposes the need for a novel integrated intellectual framework with a communally based epistemology and ontology that is premised on an understanding that Christianity is a ‘non-Western religion’. She cautions, however, that this can only be achieved where ‘the Christian faith lives as a vital presence, informing human experience – individually and collectively – and so is capable of shaping all of life’. She has an extremely positive yet realistic view of the present and future – ‘that the vocation of Christian institutions in Africa, Asia and Latin America could now include the rescue of the Christian academy!’ (Bediako 2014:362–363). Then we might be surprised by joy as we re-encounter the awe and wonder and love of creation, which can give us hope for the future. Similar thoughts were expressed more than 50 years ago by John V. Taylor (1963) regarding the imperfections of African Christianity:

Nor should Christian leaders be too anxious about the residuum of paganism within the Church. If ... an honest meeting between Christianity and the African world-view may be creative on the frontiers of the Church, it may be even more creative within the body of the Church itself. For *de facto* it is precisely at that point of encounter and contrast and choice that the Church will get its own authentic insights into the Word. It is at the danger point [*krisis*], the point of interchange and temptation, that a true African theology will be born, not out of syncretism but out of understanding. (p. 42)

This requires a strong commitment to see it through and significant changes in the staffing of African theological institutions. With regard to black economic empowerment, Maluleke puts it quite honestly and bluntly:

We can mobilise as many broad-based black economic empowerment deals as possible, count the transformation beans in as many ways as we want, sing the praises of our few globally ranked universities as loudly as we wish, dangle a carrot here and there for white male researchers and a few white female researchers to fight over, and show off the impressive numbers of black students but, unless we can produce an education system that casts a wider and deeper net, a system that enables black students and researchers to succeed, we can forget about national redress, give up on real global competitiveness in the long run, and we can kiss national reconciliation goodbye. (Maluleke 2015)

Maluleke’s statement was aimed at the broader academic community, yet is relevant to UP, which has made progress in this area. Nevertheless, it has been slowed down, largely due to the ending in 2014 of a spate of retirements and of

diversity appointments. However, without such continuing developments it may be difficult to maintain the momentum. World rankings detract from a focus on self-improvement, as they focus on the competitiveness of the business rather than the academic model. They dominate and control policymaking in an almost idolatrous manner. An example of this relates to pass rates, a matter with which we are inordinately preoccupied. So what, if pass rates and throughput are negatively affected in the process of and after the implementation of Africanisation? These are affected by many variables, not least lecturers’ teaching and assessment abilities, not to mention student capacity and commitment. How is this viewed and interpreted when our assessment criteria are monolithic for the most part – either oral or written examinations? Sadly, this becomes mere number crunching, not education. It is difficult to transform a developing educational system when uniform norms of ‘success’ and ‘leadership’ being strived for are set by highly developed world-class universities and prestigious newspapers who take no account of contextual distinctiveness. It is not possible to engage in holistic transformation while the agenda is set in Beijing, Sao Paulo, Edinburgh and Oxford. Transformation is time-, space- and community-specific:

it is the African who is and must be the primary and principle [*sic*] communicator of the African experience. Africanisation is a conscious and deliberate assertion of nothing more or less than the right to be African. (Naidoo 2016)

Key success factors and the post-2014 period

The significant success factors are determined on a broad university level at UP and largely relate to business and managerial performance:

- aligning the composition of the faculty with the vision of the university and our values. Diversity is a key ‘navigational marker’ of UP. In the FT change was evident in the growth of the number of non-partner church students, leading to a realignment of the faculty structure with a core and satellite church partners. It emphasises a positive environment and diversity.
- forging broad-based relationships and alliances that create a sense of cooperation and co-ownership and are conducive to life-giving theology;
- an integrated student body;
- environmental engagement;
- overarching faculty management

The principle that structure follows strategy is applied in the service of excellence and equity (FP 2011:112–13). However, the endurance of the current theological discourse is assumed.

With regard to the core academic indicators, by 2013 the FT was performing well in every indicator despite deficits in infrastructural support. These are academic staff, teaching, research diversity planning and financial sustainability (FP 2013:271–273). The dean was able to assert with some

confidence: 'The Faculty will be able to reach its own targets for 2016' (FP 2016:9). In 2015, the faculty had 20 students from Africa (excluding South Africa). Sixteen academics were NRF rated (64% of theology staff). The pass rate was 83% and the faculty had a surplus of R27 000 000. In 2014, 177 articles were published in accredited journals and this number is expected to exceed 200 in 2015. Thus, the 'Faculty performs well above targets' (FP 2016:6).

Restructuring the faculty

The basic question raised in this regard is why is this considered to be necessary? Although the FT had embarked on a preparatory mode of restructuring through the adoption of the concept of three clusters, basics, beliefs and practices, this has been grossly accelerated by the UP executives with no clearly expressed aim and purpose. The entire provenance of the issue apart from the faculty's tentative moves in this direction is dubious. The external review of 2015 made the matter clear:

We therefore see no need to change any of the current structures to achieve greater levels of productivity. It is our conviction that in terms of structure of the faculty there will be no gain with respect to efficiency, research productivity, or finance. (UP, External Review 2015a:4)

The obvious question here is how, in light of the faculty's commitment to structure following strategy, does strategy come to follow structure?

Problem statement:

The size and number of some of the departments in the Faculty of Theology has been indicated as a possible matter of concern. The Vice-Principal: Institutional Planning therefore formally requested the Dean on 9 March 2015 to conduct an investigation into the possibility of transforming certain research clusters into managerial units, i.e. departments, with the potential implication of reducing the number of departments in the Faculty (UP Restructuring 2016:2).

The use of 'transformation' is misplaced. This is a structural change, not a transformation. It is strange that the terms 'possibility', 'possible' and 'potential implication' are used as a basis for a restructuring process. Could this be interpreted as a matter of executive interference, lack of vision on the part of the academic staff (internal difference or strife) or impotence ('we cannot do anything about it anyway')? And will that operational efficiency result on the basis of reducing the number of heads of department by one when the issue has always been the lack of a faculty manager and the heavy administrative load borne by Heads of Departments? The issue of adherence to Black Employment Equity policy is raised in the appointment of heads of departments, but not in the appointment of the head of a combined Centre for Religion and Society. The aim is to maintain 'the six classical disciplines of Theology' (UP 2016:1), and there is no mention of Africanisation in the restructuring proposal, although this is an important strategic matter. One example will suffice.

5.1 The Department of Church History and Church Polity and the Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics will merge. and become: ...

5.5.3 Department of Systematic and Historical Theology (Sistematiese en Historiese Teologie). (UP 2016)

Church History (which is not historical theology), Church Polity and Ethics disappear. 'History' is replaced with 'Theology', which is the only determinant in the name of the department. The name of this proposed new department does not at all reflect its future function. A more generic name would be far more appropriate and could reflect the desire to Africanise, such as 'African Christianity' or 'Ecumenical and African Christianity'. A further issue remains unanswered: how will tinkering with the faculty structure contribute to an improvement of UP's rising in world rankings?

As noted already, no account is taken of the Africanisation of theology. Nor is mention made of the critical FT research theme on *Ecodomy*, which could provide a fruitful basis for Africanisation as in the work of Kaoma (2015a, 2015b).

A Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians was held in 1977. The final *communiqué* advocated that theology in Africa take account of context and culture and that Africa: 'requires a new theological methodology that is different from the dominant theologies of the West' (Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:192–193). Kaoma (2015a:26–27) himself does not spare Western sensitivities. In agreement with other African theologians, he states: 'Sadly, these Western polluted ontological definitions are enforced and presented as African theology, thereby missing the fundamental point that God, ancestors and spirits are concerned with the fertility of Earth'. Kaoma (2015a:53) believes that African theology missed a great opportunity to demonstrate the interconnectedness of spirituality and theological responsibility.

There is an urgent need for a clear sense of common purpose (determined by the stakeholders – university, churches, students and academic staff), courage, fortitude and a determination to see the matter through to a clearly defined conclusion with a minimum of interference and undermining, delaying tactics and obstruction. The time for minor narratives is past. That is the history of the past. This is a *kairos* opportunity to promote and commit to the metanarrative of the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

Prof. Johan Buitendag, the first post-denominational dean of the FT of UP, has provided outstanding leadership in the faculty since he took office in 2010. He has presided over a strong team of academics and practitioners during a period of change that is unparalleled in the tenure of any of his predecessors. This change is still in process and is far from complete midterm through his second term of office. He leads a faculty that has a proud and distinguished place in the field of theological research, both in Africa and in the global arena. Since the coming of democracy it has made considerable advances in transformation.

It is the leading faculty in South Africa and in Africa. Its teaching and learning processes are successful in terms of throughput and output. Its research productivity is excellent. In many ways it is deeply involved in community engagement through teaching and research. It has remained true to the mission and vision of both the faculty and UP. With regard to transformation there is still a stony road to travel. The veneer stage of Africanisation now needs to be consolidated by a deeper penetration beyond the veneer to the core wood of the African baobab tree, which has many fruits to yield. Its roots are reaching into Africa but have not yet become deeply rooted. They are still looking for life-giving African streams and lakes of water. There is an urgent need for an in-depth discussion about meaning and implications of further steps towards the implementation of Africanisation.

The FT has now reached the stage of liminality, a very uncomfortable place to be. Going backwards in such a situation is never a clever option. The only options are standing still, remaining with a commitment to what we know and are comfortable with or taking Kierkegaard's 'leap of faith' where the 'leap is the decision' (Kierkegaard 1847 in Hong 1993:102) into an uncertain and risky future and grasping all the opportunities that present themselves. That is no choice at all in facing the 'courage to be[come]' (Tillich 1952).

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