

CHAPTER 3

Towards an ecumenical theology

The young Faculty of Theology faced the problem of viability. In the university context this all boiled down to student enrolment. A faculty may have idealistic programmes and able lecturers, but if students do not enrol for its courses, it will in due time have to close shop. In the present state of the South African economy and with the way in which the government subsidises universities, faculties and departments are forced to consider the 'market' and to adapt to the requirements of the potential students if they wish to grow. In this respect the Faculty of Theology at Unisa was, and still is, in a very vulnerable position. It does not have the official support of any specific denomination which requires its candidates for the ministry to follow its courses ... on the contrary, some of the larger denominations take a very negative attitude towards the theological faculty at Unisa, so much so that they actually close their doors to it.

Strange as it may appear, it was the churches of the Reformed tradition that were most negative towards the theological faculty of Unisa. When the faculty was instituted, it was stipulated by Council that nothing should be taught which contradicted the three Reformed Confessions of Unity or the Westminster Confession. The basic theological course was the typical Reformed requirement whereby a student could only enrol for a BD after completion of a BA

degree which had to include Greek II, Hebrew II, and Latin I. The BD course consisted of New Testament Studies III, Old Testament Studies III, Dogmatics and Ethics III, Church History III, Practical Theology III and Missiology III. One would have thought that this presented a marvellous opportunity for the Reformed churches to have those candidates who could not afford to be full-time students at a residential university trained for the ministry. This did not happen and it is important to understand why.

The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK)

The NG Kerk, as well as the other two Reformed churches in South Africa, the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk and the Gereformeerde Kerke in South Africa, are confessional or, as they prefer to call themselves, confessing churches. They require the candidates who have completed their theological studies to sign a document in which they vow not to preach a word in contradiction to the three confessions of unity - the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the five Decrees of the Synod of Dordt. It stands to reason that their theological training is done within the framework of their confession. Whenever they study a theological topic or a theology or a methodology which is not of the Reformed tradition, it is always done in an apologetic manner, always concluding with proof that the Reformed tradition is the pure 'Biblical' point of view. It can be questioned whether this kind of training is scientific and really belongs at a university, where every point of view is open to testing and verification, and whether this training should not rather be given at a seminary. But these three churches have succeeded in coming to an arrangement with the respective universities where their faculties are situated, giving them total control over the syllabuses, the appointment of lecturers and the supervision over their conduct as well as their doctrine.

It is not surprising that the establishment of a theological faculty which confers the BD degree should have received the attention of these churches. In 1961 the representative of the Natal Synod of the NGK on the Curatory of the Theological Faculty (Section B) - Section A is under the control of the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk - of the University of Pretoria reported back to his Synod:

The Curatory took cognisance of the fact that the University of South Africa appointed a professor in Theology, in the person of Dr J A Lombard, a graduate from our Faculty of Theology at Pretoria, and a professor in Semitic Languages (for preparing students to study the Old Testament) in the

person of Dr A H van Zyl, also a graduate from Pretoria and a candidate for the ministry of our church. It is clear that these appointments will create opportunities for obtaining a BD degree. It seems a matter of utmost importance that the Curatory of the Theological Faculty should investigate the possibility of young people obtaining a BD degree from the University of South Africa and then simply applying for permission to enter the ministry of the church.

The Synod of Natal referred the whole issue to the Synod of the Transvaal which has supervisory authority over the theological faculty at Pretoria and in whose area the University of South Africa is located (Minutes of the General Synod of the NGK 1962:160).

The two ministers of Vryheid and Newcastle were not satisfied to leave it at that and tabled a motion asking their representative on the Curatory 'to act timeously by voicing a strong protest against the possibility of any candidate being allowed into the ministry in the Dutch Reformed Church, who had not trained at our two recognised institutions according to our confession and tradition' (Minutes of the General Synod of the NGK 1962:160).

In the constitution ('kerkorde') of the reconstituted Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk the matter of the training of candidates for the ministry is a matter for the General Synod. The General Synod of 1970 had on its agenda a report from its own executive committee dealing with the 'non-ecclesiastical theological training at Unisa' - this in response to the reports of both the Synodical Commission of the Northern Transvaal Synod and its own committee on missions, voicing concern about the fact that both Black and White students received theological training at Unisa. The General Synod asked the two bodies to continue their investigation into the matter and promised them all the help they could muster (Minutes of the General Synod of the NGK 1970:29). In 1982 they adopted a proposal from the Synodical Commission:

Because of the different kind of theological training offered by the University of South Africa and the fact that the NGK has no participation in appointing, selecting, supervising and disciplining lecturers, nor in the training and guidance of students, Unisa's training will not be recognised in part or in toto for entry into the ministry of the NGK.

(Minutes of the General Synod
of the NGK 1982:643, 644)

It must be mentioned that the NGK has laid down no official impediment to ministers doing postgraduate studies at Unisa. A very high percentage of the postgraduate students are ministers of the NGK. More than half of the staff of the theological faculty at Unisa are trained ministers of the NGK. Until 1978 the ministers who accepted posts at Unisa were granted full status as ministers on the grounds of Article 11.2 of the constitution ('kerkorde') of the NG Kerk, which stipulates:

If a minister leaves his congregation and accepts another office, he forfeits his status as minister of the Word of God, the only exception being if he is appointed in a synodical post or beforehand receives permission from the law committee of the General Synod. Such permission can only be granted if his new office is of a spiritual nature and stands in direct relationship to the preaching of the Gospel.

Unisa lecturers were regarded as such.

But in 1978 the Synod decided to apply the old Reformed principle, as was laid down in the Church Order of Dordt, very stringently. Accordingly the status of a minister was again brought in direct relation to a calling from a congregation. They did stretch this principle slightly to include a calling by a synodical body, thus including professors of theological faculties of the church.

At the Synod of 1982 some organisations like the Bible Society, who employed ministers of the church and thought that it was important that those ministers should maintain their status, asked Synod to include them in the list of the privileged. Synod changed Article 11 to read: '... and is regarded to be in the interest of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk'. In the procedural rules for the status of ministers they are mentioned: ministers in service of the Bible Society, the religious programmes of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, Transworld Radio and the Afrikaans Student Christian Movement. But professors of Theology at Unisa only have the status of a candidate (proponent).

I think it is important to point out that the attitude of the personnel individually and as a faculty has been very cooperative towards the three theological faculties of the NG Kerk. Some of them preach regularly in various congregations. Since 1975 Professors F J Botha, J H Roberts, W S Vorster, W Vosloo, H J Dreyer (Semitics) and Dr C F A Borchardt have been asked by the University of Pretoria to do part-time lecturing in the Faculty of Theology in Pretoria. The council of the University of South Africa gladly gave them

permission to do so. The Curatory of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk paid Unisa the compliment of calling some of the Unisa lecturers to posts in their faculties: F J Botha, C F A Borchardt, W Vosloo, J H le Roux, J A du Rand and recently Professor J W Hofmeyr. They all accepted, a proof of their sustained loyalty to their church. Rev H C van Zyl accepted a call to the Theological Seminary in Bloemfontein. Professor A H van Zyl, the first professor of Semitic Languages at Unisa, was called as professor in Old Testament Studies at the Faculty of Theology, where he served for an extended period, even as dean of the faculty. Professor Bosch, when he was dean of the Faculty of Theology at Unisa, declined a call as associate professor at Stellenbosch (perhaps this is the appropriate place to mention that he was invited no less than twice to accept the prestigious chair in Missiology at Princeton in the United States, which he also declined).

In 1974 the Huguenot College at Wellington approached Unisa and asked to be incorporated as a college of Unisa without forfeiting its own character (Minutes of Council 1975:301-305). (This is a college where social workers and spiritual workers are trained for service in the Dutch Reformed churches.) After long deliberations this request was granted and arrangements were made to the satisfaction of both the Board of Control of the Huguenot College and the Council of Unisa. The principal of the college is a full member of the Faculty of Theology at Unisa.

The same goodwill was demonstrated when the South African Bible Society asked Unisa to relinquish Professor F J Botha from half of his obligations for a period of five years so as to enable him to help with a new translation of the Bible into Afrikaans. The Bible Society paid Unisa R2 000 per annum to enable the University to make use of a substitute for half of Professor Botha's services. Council approved this (Minutes of Council 1970:293).

The Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk allows ministers of their church who accept lecturing posts at Unisa's theological faculty to keep their status as ministers of the church on condition that they serve as pastoral assistants in one of the congregations of the church. In that way the church maintains its supervision over the lives and the doctrine of these lecturers. This seems to be a very wise decision not only from the church's perspective, but also as concerns the lecturers. They remain involved in their church, and since they have to face a congregation when preaching, their theology is prevented from becoming philosophical speculation.

In 1969 one of the prospective students enquired from the secretary of Synod about the possibility of completing his theological studies (BD) at Unisa and being ordained as a minister of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk. He was told in answer: 'You are notified, with the consent of the Chairman of the Curatory, that we have had previous enquiries of this nature, which we refused, because the church does not recognise the BD degree of the University of South Africa to be adequate to allow candidates into the ministry in the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk' (Minutes of the General Commission of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk 1969:86).

The General Synod faced this same question in 1983 via a report of their Curatory:

The Curatory paid attention to the problem of students taking a BD degree at Unisa. The doubts of the Curatory are because of the fact that the training done at that University is of an academic nature and not geared for the training of ministers. The Curatory suggests that Synod should use discretion by allowing some students who did not study at our faculty into the ministry after hospitation of one year at our faculty.

(Minutes of the Synod of the NHK 1983:260)

Synod did not accept this proposal, but decided: 'Ministers of the church are only trained in the Theological Faculty, Section A, at the University of Pretoria. Partial BD training at another faculty will not be recognised for degree purposes' (Minutes of the Synod 1983:125, 126). This decision and the fact that it would not be included in their constitution may be an indication that they left the door slightly open for dealing with every application on merit.

The Gereformeerde Kerke in South Africa, to the best of my knowledge, would never ever contemplate the possibility of allowing anybody trained at Unisa to minister to 'White' congregations. As far as I can interpret the documents, the positive attitude this church had towards the establishment of a theological faculty came from the presumption that it would be the heart of theological training for 'Black' ministers, in the true tradition of the pre-1957 structure of the University of South Africa. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that the Hammanskraal Theological School for training 'Black' ministers for the Gereformeerde Kerke in South Africa initially made use of the study material for the BD courses at Unisa (Minutes of Council 1969:336 and

Minutes of Senate 1969:835-836). This relationship does not exist any more, and the Hammanskraal Theological School is attached to the theological faculty of the Gereformeerde Kerke at the University of Potchefstroom.

The picture was brighter from the point of view of the so-called 'English-speaking' churches, as well as from the non-traditional, and those ministers (Black and White) who were trained at a theological seminary and who now wished to obtain a university degree in theology.

As I have indicated previously, four of the English-speaking churches in South Africa, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Congregational Church and the Anglican Church, were responsible for the installation of a faculty of Divinity at Grahamstown. It is only natural for these churches to prefer that all their candidates receive their theological training at Grahams-town or the Federal Seminary. In spite of this, these churches do not regard Grahamstown as the only faculty where their theological students can be trained for the ministry.

The Methodist Church has a system of in-service training. Their probationers are allowed to do their academic theological training at the College for Theological Education by Extension (TEEC) or at Unisa. In 1989 no fewer than 29 Methodist probationers were doing the BTh course at Unisa. The General Conference of the Methodist Church has resolved that probationers enrolling for the BTh course at Unisa are required to include the following courses in their curricula: Biblical Studies I, and introductory half-courses in each of the following subjects: Systematic Theology, Theological Ethics, Church History, Practical Theology, Missiology and Science of Religion; two additional half-courses in Biblical Studies or Old Testament and/or New Testament studies; an additional half course in each of the four subjects; a further six half-courses in the subjects chosen as majors. Such probationers are required to pass a minimum of two half-courses in the previous end-of-year examination. All the curricula must be approved by the Secretary of the Committee for Extra Collegiate Probationers (Minutes of the Conference of the Methodist Church 1988:32-55). Residential students of the Methodist Church are trained at Rhodes University or the Federal Seminary (Fedsem) in Pietermaritzburg.

The Presbyterian Church, according to information supplied by the Reverend Perkins, secretary of the Committee on the Ministry of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, also allows their probationers to do a BTh degree

at Unisa. While still a probationer, the candidate must serve in a congregation under the supervision of an ordained minister. Before being allowed into the ministry, he must deliver letters of recommendation from this minister as well as from the Kirk-session, and a degree or a diploma in theology. Most residential students study at Rhodes University.

The Anglican Church encourages their probationers to rather take the theological course of the TEEC - usually the Diploma of the Joint Board of Theology. Those students who distinguish themselves in these courses are encouraged to do a university degree either at Rhodes University, Natal University or Unisa. Those who have chosen to study at Unisa are required to do courses as well in Christian Worship and Christian Education supplied by the church. Lay ministers are encouraged to study either at the TEEC or Unisa, depending on their scholastic qualifications. Residential students are trained at St Paul's College, Grahamstown, or at the Federal Seminary.

The Congregational Church's ministers are trained either full-time at Grahamstown or the Federal Seminary in Pietermaritzburg, or part-time through Unisa. In addition they have the system of probationer training which is under the supervision of a director and a committee for training of ministers during the probationer period. After receiving their degree or diploma the probationers must do service in a congregation under supervision of an ordained minister. Only after completion of this period are they allowed to be ordained as ministers.

The Roman Catholic Church does not make use of the Faculty of Theology at Unisa for training diocesan or religious priests, because they are expected to receive their training at St John Vianney College or at Cedara, both of which are affiliated to the Urbana University in Rome. They do, however, allow individuals to do postgraduate studies at Unisa. There are no restrictions on nuns who wish to obtain a degree in theology enrolling at Unisa. The fact that Professor Brian Gaybba and Sister (now Professor) Marie-Henry Keane were appointed to the staff of the theological faculty of Unisa naturally served as an encouragement for many nuns to enrol at Unisa.

The majority of the 'White' **Baptist** ministers are trained at the Baptist seminary in Parktown, Johannesburg, and the majority of 'Coloured' ministers at their seminary in Cape Town. Naturally they can only obtain a diploma in

theology from the seminaries, and those Baptist ministers who have the desire to obtain a university degree in theology, which would open the door for them to do postgraduate studies, often study at Unisa.

The Faculty of Theology, under the leadership of Professor D J Bosch, has made a meticulous analysis of the curricula of every seminary in the country, and is prepared to give academic credits to students who studied first at one of these seminaries, according to the academic standard of the work done at the different seminaries. The Baptist College in Parktown receives high accreditation, and this encourages many Baptist ministers to enrol for a degree at Unisa.

When the theological faculty was established it also received support from the smaller non-traditional churches. It seems as if the Seventh Day Adventist Church's theological College at Helderberg, Somerset West, made use of the Unisa courses, very much in the same way as the Gereformeerde Kerke did with their 'Black' students at Hammanskraal. They allowed their best students to enrol for a BA (Theol) degree, and the lecturers assisted the students in these 'degree-classes' in mastering the study material Unisa supplied. Naturally this enabled the lecturers to point out to their students any undesirable theological tendencies in the various courses. (Lately this college works in collaboration with Andrews University in the United States, a university run by the Seventh Day Adventist Church in America. This university has full accreditation, and those ministers who pass their examinations quite frequently enrol for postgraduate studies at Unisa.)

The Lutheran Seminary at Mapumulo in Natal decided in 1969 to enrol some of their students for the BA, BD courses at Unisa. The controlling board decided that these students must take Biblical Studies III, Sociology III, Greek II, Hebrew II, Latin I plus one course in English or Afrikaans (Minutes of the Executive Committee of Senate 1969:589). This association also diminished with time.

Pastor J T du Plessis, the honorary secretary for the Committee on Education and Training of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, asked Senate if it would be possible for the University of South Africa to adapt its theological courses in such a way that it could accommodate his church's requirements for training their pastors. The matter was referred to the Faculty of Theology. In its report, which was approved by Senate, it stated that the University of South

Africa cannot install courses for separate churches or religious organisations, but it invited the students from the AMF to make use of the theological courses of Unisa. If the AFM finds it necessary to supplement those courses with other courses they deem necessary, it is naturally free to do so, but it must be understood that these courses cannot be part of the curricula of the Unisa courses (Minutes of Senate 1959:258).

This directive was applied by many of the smaller churches. Many of the ministers from the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches who had been trained at seminaries enrolled for a degree at Unisa. The same applied to 'Black' ministers from across the spectrum. Most of them had a diploma of some kind from a seminary or Bible school, and many of those who had the required scholastic qualifications enrolled for a theological degree at Unisa.

This development could not but have a very determining influence on the direction in which the new faculty had to move. The 'market' required the lecturers to move away from the continental style of theological education towards the Anglo-American style. This change had a very negative effect on postgraduate work in the Biblical subjects as well as Church History.

It is rather surprising to note how long it took the lecturers to grasp the full implications of this change. In 1973 three senior members of faculty edited a very important publication, *Introduction to theology*. The English edition appeared in 1974. It is obvious that its purpose was to introduce students to the full spectrum of theology, but this theology was done from a Reformed theological perspective. The authors included Professor F J van Zyl of the Hervormde Kerk's Faculty of Theology as well as Dr P B van der Watt, at that time from the NGK Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch. One can only presume that the idea behind the book was that it would be used by all the 'Reformed' theological faculties.

In the first chapter Professor König explained to students what theology was all about. Why is it accommodated in a separate faculty? His answer:

Without Jesus Christ and faith in Him, an independent theological faculty would indeed be unnecessary. This faith has taken shape in the lives of men, in proclamation and prayer, in songs of praise and obedient Christian living. This Word, Jesus Christ, accepted and appropriated, is the theme in all the theological subjects.

(König 1974:10)

He expounded the object of theology:

In theology we are concerned with more than 'God-in-Jesus-Christ'. Precisely because this God is the living God, the acting God, theology is concerned with his acts ... his creatures, and the unique relationship in which He stands towards his creatures: the covenant. Though theology reflects ... particular accents and emphases at particular times ... nevertheless the breadth and comprehensiveness of the object, God and his creation, must never be surrendered to a passing theological fashion.

(König 1974:10)

When he dealt with the subject of theology, he emphasized the wide range of 'theologians': Precisely because reality is inseparably bound to God, but at the same time is estranged from God, we live in a tension-ridden, troublesome and dangerous situation. Anyone engaged in a theoretical way with this unnatural situation - in whatever discipline it may be - is basically busy with theology, even though it may be non-Christian and radically unsound. Because of the possibility of this unsound theology he narrowed the theologians down:

But in order to be such a theologian (or mature Christian) it is essential to live in the 'communion of the saints' and so to share in the thinking of other believers In this sense theology is pursued in and by the church. And yet the theological subject needs to be even more limited. The sheer volume of the Bible, the long duration of church history, the complex situation in which we live, demand intensive specialisation For this reason it is important that there should be 'theologians', people that are fully engaged in the various theological disciplines.

(König 1974:15, 16)

In his chapter on the Old Testament Professor Eybers wrote: 'If we are to really do any theology (statements about God), before anything else, it is necessary to know and understand the content of the Bible, for in the Bible God reveals himself to man' (Eybers 1974:31). Professor F J Botha wrote: 'The Old and the New Testaments together form Holy Scriptures. The Old points forward to the New, and the New links with the Old. The one cannot be studied apart from the other. There is no difference in principle between the

study of the Old and the New Testaments' (Botha 1974:72). Dr Van der Watt used a very Reformed approach to describe Church Polity. 'Church law sets out to study the government of the institutionalised church - as this must be according to the word of God ... *scientia sacra regendi ecclesiam* (Voetius)' (Van der Watt 1974:113).

The same can be said of Professor D J Bosch's chapter on missiology. He was fresh from the 'mission field', and his sympathetic attitude towards the praxis of mission is obvious:

Even though missiology has only recently emerged as a full-fledged theological subject, its concern is nevertheless very old ... from the moment of its birth the church was engaged in mission, and indeed as something which was quite self-evident, involving no self-questioning as to why it was doing it, or whether it was doing it in the right way.

(Bosch 1974:159, 160)

'Whenever in the history of the Christian church the main emphasis has fallen on theologising, or dogma, mission work has seldom come into its own' (Bosch 1974:162). 'At the risk of over-simplification we can almost assert that the greatest mission expansion took place where the matter of mission enjoyed the least theological recognition' (Bosch 1974:163). He did not argue that theology and mission are irreconcilable, but rather that this state of affairs should be attributed to a distorted ecclesiology. Missiology was a technique rather than a theology of mission. Since the Second World War the tide has turned. 'A mass of publications on the basis of mission and the Biblical theology of missions appeared' The new developments are a tremendous gain for church, mission and theology. 'If the church is not mission it ceases indeed to be the church. So too, if theology is not mission related, it ceases to be theology. But also: Mission ceases to be mission if it is not church-related' (Bosch 1974:163, 164). He argues that the place of missiology in the field of theology 'touches the very essence of theology'. But to fulfil its task the church must set out 'a scripturally based concept of the definition, goals and method of mission. Missiology is thus both descriptive and normative' (Bosch 1974:167).

In his chapter on practical theology, Professor Johanson pointed out that the title of the discipline is very misleading. He believes that practical theology is not concerned in a superficial way with the practical aspects and problems of the ministry. It was Schleiermacher who laid the foundations for its position as a scientific study, and gave it a place in the sciences of the contemporary

church (Johanson 1974:173). In his exposition of this relationship he used the Reformed theologian W D Jonker's 'Theologie en praktyk', the Englishman Martin Thornton's 'The function of theology', and Karl Barth's 'Church dogmatics'. He concludes:

Practical Theology then is theology through and through, having its specific theological orientation in the doctrine of the church. This doctrine, rightly understood, is rooted in Christology, and, as the 'earthly-historical' manifestation of His presence, it reaches out into the world in service, witness and example.

(Johanson 1974:179)

This period saw an amazing growth in the student body and consequently new members of staff had to be appointed. The heads of departments realised that they could encourage students from the English-speaking churches and the smaller churches if lecturers were appointed from outside the Reformed tradition. It was not that easy because applicants from Reformed quarters usually had better academic qualifications. In this period Canon Trevor Verryn (Anglican), Rev J S Wiid (Baptist), Professor Klaus Nürnberger (Lutheran), Ms C Kourie and Dr Brian Gaybba (Roman Catholic) and Dr C Villa-Vicencio (Methodist) were appointed. Some of the appointments made from the Reformed tradition were young men who had just completed postgraduate studies abroad, and who would possibly not have been acceptable to Reformed theological faculties, either because of their political convictions or their 'liberal' theology. Since the sixties, lecturers were appointed who in later years would play a leading role in the faculty - Drs J J Burden, J S Krüger, W J M Janson, C J Botha, P G R de Villiers, W S Vorster, W A Saayman, J W Hofmeyr, I J du Plessis, E A C Pretorius, Ferdinand Deist, H A Lombard, Joan Annandale, Len Hulley, J A Wolfaardt, M L Daneel, W Vosloo and H J C Pieterse. Among the appointments in the junior ranks we find theologians who are starting to play major roles in the faculty - E van Niekerk, W J Wessels, H L Bosman, J Steyn and J A Burger.

With the demand for a more 'English'-orientated training arising, the attitude of the Reformed churches towards their members in faculty did not really enhance the interests of 'Reformed theology' at the faculty. These lecturers experienced some form of ostracism, letting them feel that they had let their own church down by taking up posts at Unisa. It required an effort on their part to feel at home in their own churches. They were seldom asked to preach in their own church, and given very little recognition. Because of many

reasons, to which I will return later, some of them found it hard to listen to, what they believed to be, hopelessly outdated expositions of Scripture. One cannot escape the feeling that the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk forfeited the talents and service of some of its brightest young men, and so lost the opportunity to have an influence in a faculty which indisputably plays a major role in the development of theology in Southern Africa.

These realities contributed to the fact that the theologians of Unisa had to widen their perspectives on theology to take their students' needs into account - it had to move to a more ecumenical approach to theology. One of the first theologians to grasp this reality was Professor Adrio König. In 1976 he read a paper at the annual meeting of the Dogmatic Society of South Africa at Stellenbosch. His topic was 'Theological and confessional plurality and pluriformity' (König 1976:47-56). In this paper he asked penetrating questions and made bold statements. He pointed out that if one could integrate plurality in theology into the total conception of your theology, it could broaden and enrich your outlook on the totality of God's revelation, and should therefore be welcomed. He argued that there is a big difference between a confession (of your faith) which is an act of decision for Christ, and a creed, which is the systematic exposition of the beliefs of a particular denomination. He insisted that there can only be one confession of faith in the church, but this confession could be articulated in different ways by the different denominations. Pluriformity of creeds can only mean that each of the denominations possesses just a portion of the truth, so if one really wants to have a grasp of the fullness of the truth, one would have to study all the creeds and understand them in their historical and theological context.

In 1975 some of the lecturers of faculty published a volume of essays titled *Theology and renewal*. This volume is a testimony of the effect of the lecturers' encounter with other theologies. It did not only bring renewal to their theological approach, but also to their application. All nine essays indicated that some kind of renewal was taking place over the broad spectrum of their theology: 'A few old and new approaches to the books of the Old Testament' (I H Eybers); 'The exegesis of the Synoptic gospels - past and future' (W S Vorster); 'A renewing approach for the exegesis of the Pauline conditional clauses' (J A du Rand); 'What is the church?' (J H Roberts); 'The Afrikaans churches and the Rebellion, 1914-15' (C F A Borchardt); 'Vincentius of Lerinum on changes and renewal' (J A Stoop); 'Reformed certainty over and against Roman Catholic infallibility' (A König); 'En route to a theologia Africana' (D J Bosch) and 'Christian worship and social change' (Brian Johanson).

In 1978 the faculty was compelled to issue a second (revised and enlarged) edition of *Introduction to theology*. All the authors this time were on the staff of Unisa. When A König revised his introductory chapter on 'Theology', he re-emphasized his Christological approach. 'This accepted or appropriated Word, Jesus Christ, is the deepest ground for the unity and solidarity of these disciplines and their grouping in one faculty' (König 1978:8). He asks: 'Then what ought to be the role of the Bible in theology?' And his answer:

On the one hand, in certain subjects (Biblical Studies, for example, or Old and New Testament) by their very nature the Bible will play a great part - yet even here students will find that they do not deal only with the Bible, but will have to consult many other books that directly or indirectly explain facets of it. On the other hand it is basically correct to say that in all theological subjects the Bible ought to have a normative function.

(König 1978:13)

When he acknowledges that all theological investigation concerns the question of God, he qualifies his answer in this way:

The entire created reality must come under the scrutiny of theology. This becomes a little clearer when we take account of the theological character of creation, which is not a static entity, but a beginning, with world history as a necessary sequel - as the realisation of God's covenant, which is his purpose in creation. In these terms, then, we cannot possibly be engaged legitimately with any facet of reality, if we do not recognise its reference to God and its place in his plan. Who, for instance, can study or expound the preaching of Amos without becoming directly involved in questions of social structures and practical politics, but always in their relation to faith.

When he explained the subject of theology, he revealed his paradigm: 'In the church we find united those who accept a particular origin, goal, answer and interpretation - i.e. that all reality has been created by God and has its goal in joyful fellowship with Him' (König 1978:17).

One of the obvious additions to the second edition is the chapter on ecumenical theology, which I believe is a reproduction of Professor König's inaugural address. In this chapter he emphasized ecumenical theology which inquires into the correct attitude that should exist among the differing confessions. This is clearly an endeavour to explain the theological approach in the theological faculty of Unisa.

In modern times theologians from different confessions are increasingly helping one another, discovering more and more mutuality and learning to tackle the issues confronting Christianity together. We realise that our divisions stand under the judgment of God. The time of polemic and apologetic attitudes toward fellow-Christians is past. This spirit hallmarks the identity of the Theological Faculty at Unisa. Our student body displays a great diversity of confessional groupings, and lecturers are appointed on academic quality and not on confessional loyalty. Faculty in 1976 expressed its purpose 'to serve ecumenically on a broad front' and so to make as much provision as possible for the particular requirements of the various churches and seminaries.

(König 1978:314)

He believed that we could accomplish this by applying a scientific method to all our theoretical research. 'We have to insist, of course, that all applicants are Christians, since the nature of this field of study demands a faith-relationship with Jesus Christ. By virtue of the object of study a person who is not a Christian, is not fully equipped to engage in research in this field of study or to teach it' (König 1978:315).

But this argumentation eventually takes him beyond Unisa. From a scientific, academic perspective 'every theological faculty must by definition be ecumenical, seeing that each of its various disciplines has only one area of study'. To the scientific argument he adds an ecclesiastical one:

Because of the biblical message concerning the church as the one flock of the one Shepherd, the one body of the one Head, the one people of the one God, the one temple of the one Spirit, this church with one hope, one faith, one baptism, dare not subscribe to any structural or other impairment of, or challenge to its unity ... in the church there must always be

room for different theologians and various types of theologies ... Individuals - and even ecclesiastical groupings may, of course, give preference to particular theologies and thus to particular faculties.

(König 1978:315, 316)

All this does not imply 'that a lecturer may not hold his own confessional or theological views, but rather that his fidelity to them will not be exclusive or function antithetically; they will rather inspire him to understand and teach the scriptural message along with his colleagues from other confessions and churches' (König 1978:314).

In the exposition of his own discipline, 'Systematic theology', he explained why this subject is necessary, although we believe not in a system, but in Jesus Christ the living Lord. He argues that Jesus Christ is the most encyclopedic person who ever lived - so if we wish to live in fellowship with Him, we need to learn something of his rich life, and to understand what we believe when we confess Him. He agrees that there are different confessions and creeds, all trying to formulate the full meaning of his person. In systematic theology all the traditional confessional theologies receive attention - Orthodox theology, Roman Catholic theology, Lutheran and Reformed theology, Pentecostal theology and the theology from the Churches of England. By studying systematic theology in this way, our understanding of Scripture increases and will always keep on changing. In this sense this discipline's task is always to test the message of the church and deter it from heresy (König 1978:134-198).

König practised what he preached. He proved the sincerity of his views by appointing people from different denominations in his department: Dr C Villa-Vicencio (Methodist), Dr B Gaybba and Sister Marie-Henry Keane (Roman Catholic), Dr Klaus Nürnberger (Lutheran), Dr Simon Maimela (a Black Lutheran) and Dr Len Hulley (Methodist).

Professor J A Stoop did not make any substantial changes in his introduction to 'Church history' (pp 100-120). The mere fact that he put all the emphasis of the subject on the early (Patristic) period naturally has some bearing on the ecumenical perspective as such, because the major schisms in the church took place after this period. During the early period the church was still defending its unity boldly against the heretics and schismatics. There was one impediment to this approach by Professor Stoop - to study this period requires a sound knowledge of Greek and Latin, and the faculty had eased its language requirements. The study of the early period never really flourished.

But it was in the introduction to Church Polity that the difference between the contributions in the first and the second editions is very obvious. Where Dr Van der Watt wrote from a Reformed perspective, Professor Stoop approached Church Polity from a historical perspective. He started from the early period and gave a description of the historical development of church government. He believed Church Polity must be 'the history of ecclesiastical legal forms'.

Missiology. Professor Bosch did not rewrite his article, but in his modifications a new approach is depicted. It is obvious that he became sensitive towards sophisticated 'Black' and Asian feelings, which he probably did not encounter or 'hear' while he was a missionary in Transkei. Now he had become conscious of those people experiencing missions as paternalistic, the affluence of White superiority, and a clear indication of the absence of sensitivity for, or appreciation of, the religious heritage of indigenous peoples. These people are simply regarded as the objects of mission. They, from their side, see the missionary as part and parcel of the colonial era, apostles of affluence, not sacrifice; cultural superiority, not Christian humility; technological efficiency, not human identification; White supremacy, not human communion and liberation (Bosch 1978:231). Bosch contradicts this with the 'White' depiction of mission as the 'spreading-of-the-gospel-of-Jesus-Christ-overseas' (Alex Beale).

The answer to this predicament? Not two sciences of mission, but a scientific approach - 'to be on guard against every tendency to partiality, continually to compare and correlate the facts, carefully to investigate before making any pronouncements, always remaining critical - even of his own standpoint' (Bosch 1978:231). Is this a step towards the approach of Science of Religion? Bosch answers by pointing out that Missiology and Science of Religion are (at the moment) associated in one department, although they are both full-fledged subjects in their own right. In practice this means that each must be prepared to acknowledge that the other can influence it. If, for instance, Science of Religion assumes that, because Missiology regards one religion as the true one, it is not really an objective science - it cannot expect Missiology to take it seriously. But conversely, should Missiology accuse Science of Religion of complete relativism and refuse to admit that in the religious experiences of people of other faiths there are genuine elements, it must not be taken aback at Science of Religion's ignoring it (Bosch 1978:241).

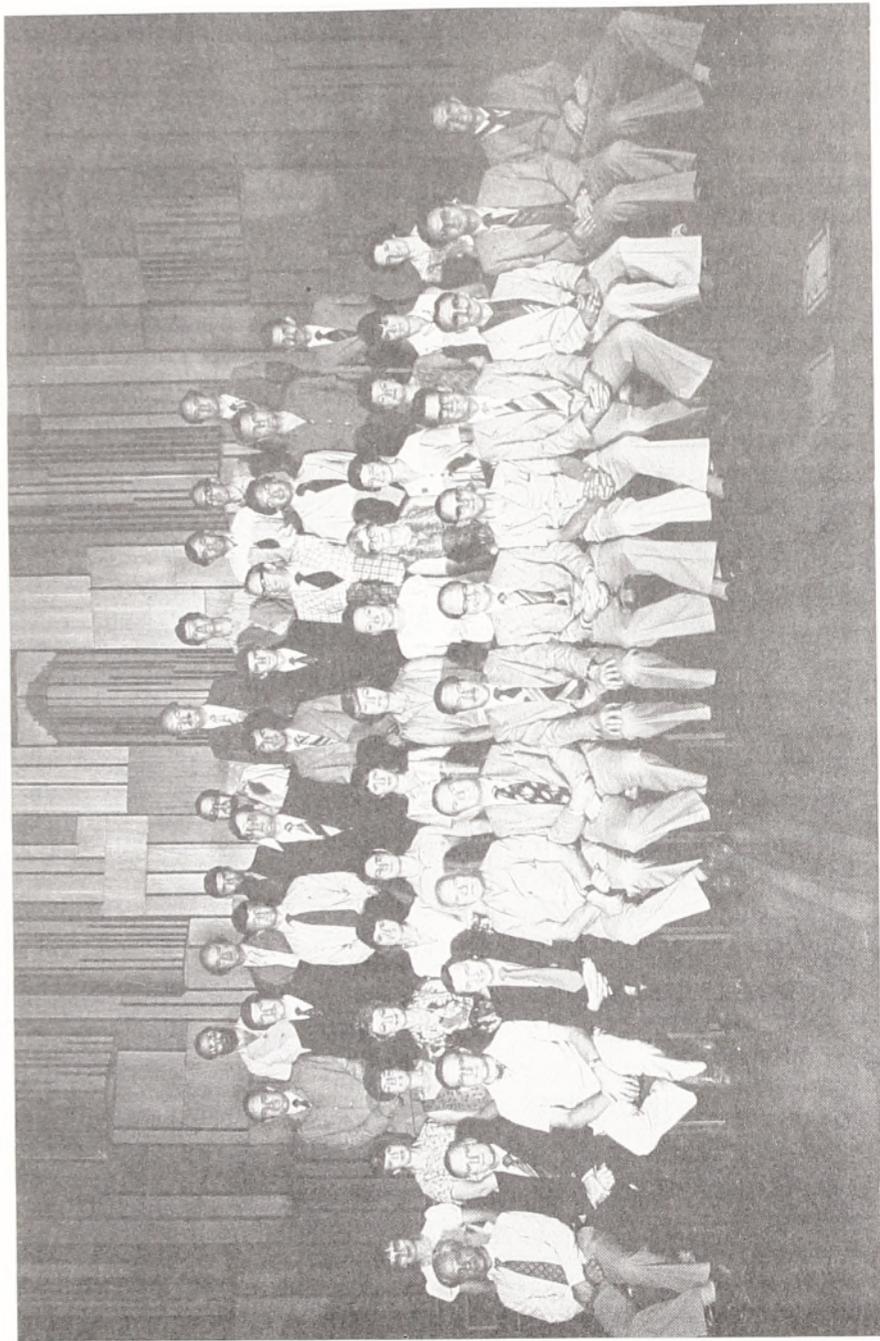
I think it is fair to conclude that the theological trend of this period could be regarded as a move towards ecumenical theology. This is underlined by two publications, both collections of essays on the theme of ecumenism, with members of faculty as editors. The first, *Die eenheid van die kerk* (The unity of the church), was compiled by Dr Piet Meiring and Rev Henry Lederle in 1978, and is obviously a reaction to a similar publication by Rev Koot Vorster the previous year, naturally from the opposite perspective, *Veelvormigheid en eenheid* (Pluriformity and unity).

The second volume was edited by Professor A C Viljoen, in honour of Professor Ben Marais on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. It was published under the poetic title: *Ekumene onder die Suiderkruis* (Ecumene under the Southern Cross) - a collection of essays in recognition of the pioneer work of Ben Marais in the Southern African context. The editor wrote in the preface:

The ecumenical movement has become the hallmark of the church history of the twentieth century - 'the great new fact of our era'. It was in this field that Professor Ben Marais made his most important contribution - not only in discussions at international conferences and ecumenical deliberations, but also in the South African context. These were rough seas, stirred up by theological and non-theological factors, which made life difficult for pioneers - true to the South African tradition. His contribution will most probably receive more attention as the historical perspective becomes more clear. This collection is a modest effort by some colleagues, former students, and friends to show their appreciation on the occasion of his seventieth birthday.

It was also a milestone in the theological development of the Faculty of Theology.

THE THEOLOGICAL FACULTY, 1979



FIRST ANNUAL SEMINAR PRESENTED BY THE
INSTITUTE FOR THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH, 1977



*l to r: Professor C Alant, Father A Nolan, Professor J J F du Rand,
Professor C W H Boshoff, Professors J H Roberts, W S Vorster, C H Rautenbach*

CHAPTER 4

Towards a new understanding of the Bible

It seems to me that the most important change in the theology of the faculty was in the Biblical subjects. How can this be explained? Some of the brightest young students who excelled in Greek, Hebrew, Old and New Testament Studies during their undergraduate and theological studies at the local Reformed theological faculties, won scholarships for postgraduate studies abroad. (It is a fact that the opportunity to study abroad is one of the most wonderful things that could happen to a South African.) Those who went to Germany had the unpleasant experience of feeling at a loss, because the methodology and general approach to the study of the Biblical sciences differed vastly from those which they were taught at the local theological faculties. While the faith of some was rocked, others experienced this as a new vision on theology and on the Bible. When they graduated and returned to South Africa, they could do nothing else but continue their research along these lines. They realised that the only way to receive international acclaim was to proceed on these principles. Such students as were appointed at Unisa enjoyed the freedom to follow their convictions. Not that this did not have repercussions, as we will point out later, because the ecclesiastical community was not ready for this new approach, and some of the theological students who were members of the

'evangelical' churches were startled by this method. (What overseas graduates who were fortunate enough to receive appointments at the theological faculties of their own churches did is something worth researching, but will be left out of this history.) What is the essence of this new hermeneutic?

NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

It is common knowledge that our philosophy of life is a determining factor in the way we do our scientific research (Vorster 1987:375). In the pre-critical period, the period before the Enlightenment, the study of the New Testament was hallmarked by a symbolic interpretation. At that stage of New Testament studies the Vitalistic paradigm was dominant, namely the acceptance that life originates in a vital principle, distinct from chemical and other physical forces. To a large extent this was the paradigm from which the New Testament was taught in South Africa.

Then came the critical period which was dominated by the mechanistic paradigm, in which the accent falls on the fragments and not on the totality. Historical criticism not only dominated everything in New Testament scholarship, but in many circles was viewed as the only way to solve the problems in the field of New Testament study (Vorster 1987:378).

In the historico-critical method there are certain points of departure in regard to the reality to be researched, usually referred to as the 'Vorverständnis', from which the research proceeds. The New Testament scholar must be a highly qualified researcher, and will try to understand the New Testament as literature about the Christian faith of the first century in a scholarly way. This research therefore is historical and literary. Furthermore, it is accepted in these circles that the Christian faith was the result of some kind of syncretism and that the core of it was the cult and the liturgy. The religious convictions of the early Christians were transmitted to succeeding generations and were eventually written down in documents known to us as the New Testament. These documents are windows through which the researcher can catch a glimpse of Jesus as well as the deeds and convictions of the early Christians. This approach not only determines how the New Testament scholar views the documents of the New Testament, but also how he will study them and what he should study. The New Testament is not studied as a coherent totality but it is broken up into fragments which are studied separately in an atomistic way. The texts of the New Testament are fragments, each of which has its own genesis. These geneses are studied by applying the historico-critical methods mentioned previously. The researcher always has to keep in mind that the

origin of the New Testament is to be seen as the origin of these small fragments - each having its own history. This is called *Formgeschichte*. This atomistic approach is applied to the language also. The Greek of the New Testament also has roots in the Septuagint and Aramaic. In the New Testament science, the focus must always be on the fragments and not on the totality (Vorster 1987:379, 380).

The words which are vital in New Testament studies are *interpret* and *understand*. They really emphasize the distance between the modern Christian reader and the time when the faith came into being. The world of the people who wrote the Bible and that of the modern reader differs so vastly that the Bible does not communicate its message clearly any more. The historico-critical method emphasizes this estrangement - and this emphasis can be experienced positively or negatively (Vorster 1987:380).

The degree to which Vorster applied this historico-critical method in his academic activities is very obvious in the second edition of *Introduction to theology*: 80-133. He was asked to write the chapter on an introduction to the study of the New Testament. On the very first page Vorster indicates the premise and the perspective from which he approaches both theology in general and the study of the New Testament. He believes theology is 'the scientific study of the texts about God. These we find in the Bible.' The Bible, and then specifically the New Testament, is 'Holy Scripture', and

its texts have something to say to the modern world about God, yet they must be read in a scientific way. Until recently, in certain circles, the Bible functioned as a theological work with its own codes and laws of interpretation ... with the result that the study of it has been carried out in a non-scientific context, since neither the methods applied nor the results obtained, could be controlled or verified. Among those who did regard the Bible as literature, it is the so-called historical approach that dominates the scene. We need to see this approach against the backdrop of the previous century's conviction that if you know the history of something, you understand the matter itself. To a considerable extent contemporary New Testament Science is still regulated by these two factors, though more and more scholars are trying to grapple with these problems by paying more attention to questions of a methodological character.

(Vorster 1978:80)

The atomistic approach is obvious in his explanation of the New Testament as a book: It

... consists of a collection of twenty seven documents written by a number of authors at various times during the first two centuries Quite apart from the fact that these writings were produced by different authors at different times, the question arises in particular as to whether we may speak of a unity of vision in them, or that the most distinctive characteristic of the New Testament is that it had so many facets. Understandably, twenty seven documents will not necessarily reflect the same point of view.

(Vorster 1978:81)

'The character of this volume with its twenty seven components makes it necessary for us to examine each of them very thoroughly in terms of its literary genre, its age and its purpose At least four literary genres may be distinguished in the New Testament: gospels, letters, a historical monograph and an apocalypse' (Vorster 1978:86). The scholar must be able to read the text in its original language, and pay attention to all the linguistic influences bearing on the origin of the text. The modern science of translation must be part of the equipment of every New Testament scholar. 'The time has gone - and gone for good - when a New Testament scholar could adequately fulfil his task as an exegete with the aid of a knowledge of Greek, a traditional lexicon ... a concordance and grammar' (Vorster 1978:87).

Vorster stated that for a New Testament scholar to understand the New Testament, necessitates the application of the 'new hermeneutics' - 'the discipline in which philosophy, theology, literary criticism, exegesis and other human sciences interact upon one another in respect of the question of understanding'. Hermeneutics is 'more than simply a subdivision of Biblical Science. It impinges upon theology as a whole, and its scope extends far beyond that' (Vorster 1978:87). The New Testament scholar will have to employ an array of auxiliary disciplines. But in order to interpret the New Testament within its context he will have to use these auxiliary disciplines as well as the canon of the New Testament to construct a frame of reference. Furthermore he will apply the textual criticism and the introduction science in a historico-critical way. The historico-critical approach, with its four major components, will have to be applied: Source criticism (*Literärkritik*), form criticism (*Formgeschichte*), tradition criticism (*Traditionsgeschichte*) and redaction criticism (*Redaktionsgeschichte*) (Vorster 1978:92).

New Testament studies were to be taught according to the historico-critical method for more than a decade at the theological faculty of Unisa. Professor Vorster ventured to explain this method in his inaugural address. The reaction aroused by this address will be dealt with in the next chapter.

THE INSTITUTE FOR THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

A very important milestone in the development of Biblical scholarship in the Faculty of Theology was the establishment of the Institute for Theological Research. As far back as 1951 Council received circular C/146/51, in which the government gave notice of the amendment of legislation re researchers:

The academic staff of a university shall be deemed to include such research workers (not being professors, lecturers or teachers) as are incumbents of posts which the Senates of such Universities have by resolution recognised as posts having academic status, and such research workers shall be deemed to be teachers of the University in respect of any provision referring to teachers of the University in the act incorporating the said university or any amendment thereof or in the Statutes of the said university or any amendment thereof.

(Minutes of Council, 24 September 1951)

In 1970 the Executive Committee of Council recommended to Council 'that it be approved in principle that research officers may be appointed in all the departments at the University' (Minutes of Council 1970:656).

The first step towards establishing such an institute came from the New Testament scholars who became aware of the lack of cooperation in theological research and the need for the coordination of specialised research done by individuals in the field of theology in this vast country. Their idea was an institute that would serve the whole theological community of South Africa (Vorster 1976:1). The first step taken by these scholars was for the specialists in the six major theological disciplines to organise themselves into study groups ('werkgemeenskappe') so as to promote research in their respective fields of study. At their annual meetings, topics for special research would be decided on, papers would be prepared by individuals or sub-groups, and then be read at the congresses and published in reports or magazines. The establishment of these 'werkgemeenskappe' must undoubtedly be regarded as a major step in promoting research in the field of theology in South Africa (Vorster 1976:3).

It is a fact worth mentioning here that in at least five of the six 'werk-gemeenskappe' it was the lecturers of Unisa who played a leading role, not only in the establishment, but also in the *modus operandi* - which was an endeavour to obtain the cooperation of scholars of all the denominations. The only exception was the Study Group for Practical Theology. The leading figure there was Professor H D A du Toit, of the Faculty of Theology (Section B) at Pretoria University. From the perspective of that faculty's approach to Practical Theology, it did not make sense to include non-Reformed theologians, so they restricted their membership to theologians from the Reformed tradition (this has also changed, and Practical Theologians from all the denominations can now be members of the Study Group for Practical Theology).

The first step in realising this dream was taken by two young New Testament scholars of Unisa, Dr J H Roberts and Mr W S Vorster, who applied successfully for a research grant from their university to do research on the methodology of New Testament Studies. Mrs Jansie Kilian, a qualified librarian, was appointed to assist with the information-retrieval system. (This proved to be a very fortunate appointment, because today Jansie Kilian and Willem Vorster are the heart of the institute.) The success of the project convinced everybody concerned of the necessity of such a research centre, and after long negotiations it was decided by Unisa to establish an autonomous research institute that could be the basis for all theological research in South Africa. In 1975 Council approved the constitution of the Institute for Theological Research (Minutes of Council 1975:1149-1151). Senate also approved a senior lectureship in Old and New Testament Studies until such time as the institute would be able to provide the necessary structure for its personnel (Minutes of the E C of Senate 1975:836). The Selection Committee unanimously recommended to Senate that Dr W S Vorster be appointed as director of the institute, with the rank of research professor. This was approved by Council (Minutes of Council 1976:6).

It was at one of the annual meetings of the New Testament scholars that Professor J H Roberts of Unisa proposed that a committee should investigate the possibility of establishing an institute for Biblical research. This study group reported back that they were convinced of the necessity of such an institute, but believed that it should be attached to a university. After discussions it was decided to approach Unisa (Vorster 1976:3).

Nobody could have had any doubt about the direction in which Professor Vorster would launch his research programmes, because his publications were very

explicit: *Modern linguistics in Bible research*; *The historicity of the facts of Jona*; *A new trend in New Testament scholarship* and *How consistent are exegetes in their thinking?*

The director had great aspirations for the role of the Institute for Theological Research. He dreamt that the whole faculty would be involved in research programmes. He himself continued with the project on the methodology of New Testament Studies, and the Department of Systematic Theology registered a project on ecumenism (Minutes of Senate 1977:678). What this institute has achieved is a success story on its own. It is not only stimulating and guiding much of the research done in the Faculty of Theology at Unisa, but it has handled important research programmes of its own. One of the dreams that did not materialise was the participation of all universities in South Africa. One of the major projects of the institute seems to be arranging seminars on burning issues of the day. It approaches these topics courageously but in a scientific way, not afraid to look at the other, sometimes very sensitive side of the issue. It seems to be undaunted in the choice of its topics but wise in choosing its teams of speakers of whom it requires the highest academic standards and methodology. The papers read at the seminars are published and made available not only to those who attend the conferences, but to the public, usually at a reasonable price. The topics appear to give a reasonably accurate reflection of theological tides: *Church and society* (1977); *Scripture and the use of Scripture* (1978); *Church unity and diversity in the South African context* (1979); *Spirit in Biblical perspective* (1980); *Christianity among the religions* (1981); *Denominationalism: its sources and implications* (1982); *Church and industry* (1983). As the faculty's attention moved towards socio-political issues, so the topics of the seminars followed suit: *Sexism and feminism in theological perspective* (1984); *Views on violence* (1985); *Reconciliation and construction* (1986); *Are we killing God's earth* (1987); *The right to life: issues in bio-ethics* (1988) and *The morality of censorship* (1989).

THE C B POWELL BIBLE CENTRE

A fascinating development within the Institute for Theological Research was the founding of the C B Powell Bible Centre, which came into being after an agreement between the trustees of the late Charles Bergh Powell Will Trust and Unisa was signed on the evening of 22 November 1983. Professor Vorster documented this remarkable history (Vorster 1985:3-13).

To understand the Bible Centre and its own special character, it is very important to know something about the man C B Powell. He was born in Kimberley on 26 February 1908, was a good sportsman but also distinguished himself in

academic circles. He was very enthusiastic about his faith. After he had qualified as a land surveyor, he started his career in SWA/Namibia, later moving to Cape Town (in 1949), where he became a very successful businessman and farmer.

He displayed increasing impatience with the so-called 'evangelicals' of the Christian faith who preoccupied themselves with the 'saving of souls' without really understanding what they were doing. He decided to establish a Bible academy where excellent theologians who had their feet on the ground could teach ordinary laymen the treasures to be discovered in Biblical research. His untimely death on 22 August 1979 eventuated in the trustees deciding to donate funds to Unisa to found a C B Powell chair for Biblical scholarship. The aim was to present practical Christian seminars in which the richness of the Bible could be made available to laymen.

The wishes of the donor regarding the Bible Centre are clearly stated in a letter he wrote to his nephew, Mr Alan Powell:

My one fear with a Biblical Research Centre is that of it becoming an academic project and so fails to do justice to those insights which can only come when the Holy Spirit controls the whole personality of the researcher. I am aware that a saint who is a scholar too, is a rare bird and I am most anxious, if at all possible, for this to be recognised and as far as possible to be given high priority

He continues:

Is there not a danger that theologians talk to one another without this talking also being to the common intelligent and informed laymen? Is it not desirable to arrange small classes as part of a project, where dialogue could take place on issues studied so as to keep the feet of the researchers on mother earth by dealing with them so as to remain personal and practical in application?

(Vorster 1985:9-10)

Unisa decided, after consultation with the trustees, to found a centre within the Institute for Theological Research. The staff of the centre are appointed as members of the institute, and the centre's objectives are to promote and to make available to ordinary lay people the results of Biblical scholarship by:

- (i) offering lectures, individually or as a series, courses, seminars, symposia, workshops, group discussions, exhibitions, etc;
- (ii) publishing research results as well as popular scientific literature about the Bible and its implications; and
- (iii) researching the Bible empirically and theoretically (Vorster 1985:11).

The founding of the C B Powell Bible Centre inaugurated a new era of doing theology at Unisa. In addition to formal teaching and research, the opportunity was created to explore the possibilities an ecumenical faculty, the only one of its kind in the country, can offer in terms of community education. Because of the number and quality of the members of faculty, the Powell donation can be used to promote the results of Biblical research in innumerable ways to ordinary Christians (Vorster 1985:11). The first 'rare bird' or director of the Bible Centre was Professor P G R de Villiers. He left Unisa to accept the chair in New Testament Studies at the theological faculty of Rhodes University in 1988. Professor Francois Swanepoel succeeded him.

A glance at the courses (with the enrolment in brackets) proves that the C B Powell Bible Centre is endeavouring to comply with the wishes of the donor: 'Religious stories for children', 1985 (147); 'Disinvestment', 1985 (21); 'How to read the Bible', 1985 (110); 'Healing by faith', 1985 (315); 'Standing by God in his hour of grieving', 1986 (150); 'How do I communicate my suffering', 1986 (150); 'Liberation Theology', 1986 (38); 'A seminar on reading the Bible', Cape Town 1986 (54); 'The Bible, the church and demonic powers', 1986 (109); 'The realism of the Text', 1986 (37); 'The Bible in a new era', 1986 (30); 'Eschatology', 1987 (50); 'Early Christians', 1988 (38); 'The Bible and stress', 1988 (74); 'The Letter to the Romans', 1988 (44); 'Good news for rich and poor', 1989 (42); 'Bible stories and their secret', Pretoria, 1989 (40); 'The message of the Bible in a nutshell', 1989 (100); 'Bible stories and their secret', Port Elizabeth 1989 (12) and the Spring School: 'God, the Bible and the child', Cape Town, 1989 (38).

THE OLD TESTAMENT

In 1986, with the celebration of its twenty-fifth anniversary, the Department of Old Testament Studies asked Professor J H le Roux, who had been a member of the department for sixteen years, to write the history of that department. His method was to give a brief description of the contribution made by each of the members of the department (Le Roux 1987:198-221). Previously he had

fresh impetus to *Pentateuchal research* in South Africa and has fresh views on the *Old Testament prophets*, and has made valuable contributions to *hermeneutics, textual criticism* and the *interpretation* of the Old Testament for modern society. Deist is not afraid to rethink and reformulate his ideas. He started out from a naive realism, moved into critical rationalism and then to critical realism (Le Roux 1987:202). He is convinced that the idea of timeless formulations of truth should be abandoned because every expression of truth is determined by history. Truth will always remain *ingeschränkte, historische und perspektivische Wahrheit*. The text of the Bible originated in a certain context and continues to exist in different contexts. So every interpretation of the Bible is thus determined historically. Biblical hermeneutics is the theory of a scholarly understanding of the Bible. One exegetical method can never be absolutised as the only valid way of approaching Scripture. So the Biblical context and the historico-critical method is a possible means of understanding the Bible, but the context of the exegete also influences his understanding of the text. In the early church the *regula fidei* was the touchstone for interpreting Scripture, during the middle ages it was the authority of the Pope, in Reformed circles it is the reformed confessions. All through the centuries each generation had its own *regula fidei* which determined what must function as 'Word of God' (Le Roux 1987:206).

J A Loader. This brilliant scholar with three doctorates (Semitics, UP, Old Testament, Groningen and Church History, Unisa) was a pupil of A van Selms. As an author his works reveal certain characteristics: erudition, thoroughness, control of the subject, interest in the minutest detail and a command of the Afrikaans and English languages. When Loader joined the department many expected a clash of interests to be inevitable as Loader had been using the discourse analysis method, while Deist used the historico-critical method. The clash did not materialise because both were too aware of the advantages and shortcomings of the different approaches to be lured into exclusivism (Le Roux 1987:216, 217). Like Deist, Loader's point of departure is history. Via the Dutch Old Testament scholars' 'third option' (that truth can only be experienced inwardly), Loader believes that our theological task consists of two aspects: critical analysis and interpretation. The Old Testament scholar must not only analyse his text, but also interpret it. This interpretation must be based on critical research. Loader is deeply involved in the study of the wisdom literature, for which he has received international recognition. His publications on the wisdom literature are based on a text-immanent reading of the final texts. Taking delight in the aesthetics of a text, he detects the smallest detail in the text, indicates its literary importance and determines its function (Le Roux 1987:206-209).

H L Bosman focuses his attention on Old Testament ethics and keeps himself busy with the problem of contextualising Old Testament studies in Africa, as well as with the theories of science underlying the methodologies applied by Old Testament scholars (Le Roux 1987:209).

Joan Annandale completed her basic theological studies at the University of Pretoria and then studied for several years under Otto Plöger in Bonn. Ever since she joined the department in 1970 she has been propagating the historico-critical approach to the Old Testament. Her first publication in *Theologia Evangelica* was 'What is Formgeschichte' (Annandale 1971:1-24). This caused many heated debates between her and the head of the department, Professor Eybers.

Space prohibits my going into detail on the contributions of younger members of the department like P J van Dyk, W J Wessels, J A Burger, W A G Nel, J P H Wessels, C L van W Scheepers, J G Strydom, I P G Gous, M Heyns and others who joined the department more recently. Their main contribution is yet to come. It is of the utmost importance to quote the last paragraph of Professor Le Roux's article, keeping in mind that he is now a professor at the theological faculty of the University of Pretoria: 'In this department of Old Testament are gathered a number of talented scholars whose research and educational work have made a major impact on the South African theological scene. One can foresee that the Department will continue to play a leading role in Old Testament research in this country' (Le Roux 1987:221). The strange thing is that it is exactly because of this new understanding of the Bible that some people accuse Unisa of being heretical. And it is exactly in this field that Unisa is endeavouring to keep in touch with Biblical research in the rest of the world. That they have to pay a price to achieve this, will be explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

In the storms

In the late seventies and early eighties the faculty must have realised the truth of Professor Lombard's adage that theology is a dangerous undertaking - especially so if that theology does not serve a particular denomination and has no theological school in which to shelter. This kind of theology, he said, will disturb people and bring down ivory towers and deprive people of their securities. And when a theology rocks the foundations of a people, it must be prepared to face hectic reaction and to be branded as heresy. I will concentrate on only three of these issues.

THE INAUGURAL LECTURE OF PROFESSOR W S VORSTER

Professor Vorster was appointed a professor at the end of 1976, and his inaugural address was delivered on 23 June 1977. He used the opportunity to describe the methodological approach he would apply in the programmes of the Institute for Theological Research. As could be expected he used terminology accessible to non-theologians. There was no reaction from his audience that evening. But a knowledgeable journalist, Rykie van Reenen, from *Rapport*, the Afrikaans Sunday paper, gave a true account of his lecture in the paper and, as is expected of a reporter, she tried to make this very technical theological discourse comprehensible to the readers of her paper. The heading given to her report was very striking: 'Read the Bible like a storybook.'

This over-simplification sounded like blasphemy to many believing Christians, who were brought up with the conviction that the Bible was the infallible Word of God. They read the newspaper report out of the theological context in which it was born. One gets the impression that many of them did not even read beyond the summary of the article, which reads:

- * We read the Bible wrongly. That is why we do not understand what this Book - the collection of old manuscripts written long ago - has to say to our modern age.
- * It is not a book with a set of rules to be consulted on issues such as whether a woman may wear slacks or should put on a hat when she goes to church, or whether you should partake in revolutionary activities or buy bonus bonds in aid of the defence force.
- * Even in sermons Bible texts are frequently applied to support the opinion of the preacher, but in such a way as if they are the Lord's opinion. Sermons can sometimes be delivered without a Biblical text.
- * It is time that we realise that it is not important whether the Bible is historically or scientifically true. It is literature and literature dealt with truth in its own particular way which differs from the method of a historical report.
- * We must read the four gospels as literature, as narratives, and read them in the same way as, say for instance, *Kennis van die aand* of André P Brink.
- * From the disciplines such as linguistics, literary science and communication we should obtain the tools to make this old, old book comprehensible and relevant for modern people.

(*Rapport*, 3 July 1977:15)

The reactions were tempestuous. There were suggestions that Vorster would become a second Du Plessis, the Stellenbosch professor of the NGK who was released from his post because of his historico-critical interpretation of the Bible. The difference, however, was that no church had any control over the theological faculty at Unisa. Professor Vorster made available to me a file of reactions to this report, reactions which can be divided into four categories:

- (i) Those of lay people and church councils who had no feeling for the problems addressed by the new hermeneutic. Here ministers could be included who never really studied this method and rejected it out of hand as modernism and theological liberalism. Most of them were pious

Christians who accepted the text of the Bible as it stands, and were not disturbed by contradictions or narratives which are difficult to accept, because they attributed this to the omnipotence of God. They read the text as a message from God, without comparing it with other parts of scripture, convinced that this is the way a reborn Christian should read the Bible. They accused Vorster of being an unconverted infidel who rejected the authority of God and of his Word. Three hundred members of one congregation signed a letter of protest and sent it to the Principal of the University. The movement 'Aksie Morele Standaard' announced that they were going to take up the battle axe.

(ii) Those of theologians who accepted the authority of the Bible and had a hermeneutic which they firmly believed helped them to understand the message of the Bible. They saw this method as a heresy coming from Europe that endangered the religious life of the country. The New Testament scholar at the University of Potchefstroom, Professor J C Coetzee, attacked him in three consecutive editions of *Die Kerkblad* (7, 14 and 21 July 1977). He lamented the fact that it was not only necessary to protest against the rejection of the authority of Scripture in Reformed circles in the Netherlands, but now also at the theological faculty of Unisa. He exhorted Vorster in the Name of Jesus Christ, the King of the Church, to leave this disastrous road. He pointed out that the Bible leaves no alternative.

- Jesus was born from a virgin - or he was the son of a whore.
- Jesus died on the cross for our sins - or his death on the cross was the tragic end of an idealist who paid the penalty for his dreams.
- Jesus rose from the grave - or Scripture is a collection of lies and our faith of no avail.

(iii) Those of theologians who agreed with Vorster up to a point, but felt that perhaps he went too far. Dr D J C van Wyk, the editor of *Die Hervormer*, agreed with Vorster that the Church could and should make use of other sciences to help us understand the message of the Bible. Expositors must keep in mind that the Bible was written by humans ages ago. It is very important that we should understand the Bible correctly, because our faith and our salvation require it from us. But then he made a few critical remarks, as he was convinced that there would be dangerous consequences from Vorster's lecture, which raised concern. We should not over-emphasise the role of linguistics or any auxiliary science and keep in

mind that the Bible has a divine origin as well as a human origin. Many of the abuses of the Bible pointed out by Vorster have been pointed out frequently in the past (*Die Hervormer*, October 1977).

In the same edition of *Die Hervormer*, a New Testament scholar wrote an article in which he defended Professor Vorster. Van Aarde shared Vorster's concern about the irresponsible and unscientific use of Scripture. He differed from Vorster in so far as he believed that certain facts in the Bible must be true - including the virgin birth, Jesus' life, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension to heaven.

- (iv) There was whole-hearted support and praise for Vorster's academic approach and integrity, but such reactions on file all came from some of the most outstanding Biblical scholars in Europe: Freek Klijn (Groningen), Gerard Luttikhuisen (Groningen), C J Labuschagne (Groningen), Georg Strecker (Göttingen), Wolfgang Richter (München), W C van Unnik (Utrecht), James Barr (Oxford) and A van der Woude (Groningen). An extract from Klijn's letter must suffice: 'It was a great pleasure to receive your inaugural lecture. I found it excellent. I am convinced that you have done a great service by giving an account of all the problems attached to interpretation. From your letter I understand that you aroused a cloud of dust. I hope that you were not attacked personally. Honesty and integrity always survive that kind of attack. I hope that there was some positive reaction as well.'

I was told that the Principal of the University received a letter in which he was promised a huge donation to university funds if he closed down the theological faculty. The Minister of Education, the Honourable Dr P J Koornhof, who was spending his holiday at the Natal South Coast, received a telegram from Pretoria: 'As a Christian and as a citizen of the Republic of South Africa I demand that inquiry should be made as to how it is possible for Professor Vorster of Unisa to make such statements about God's Word as were reported in *Rapport* of July 3, 1977 page 15.' The minister phoned the Principal that same night, and Vorster had to appear before the Principal the next day.

The chairman of the Committee of Senior Lecturers of the Faculty, Dr J S Krüger, arranged a symposium on 19 September 1977. Invited were all those interested in an open discussion on the inaugural lecture. In the letter of invitation it was mentioned that the lecture had evoked varying reactions, some enthusiastic, others perturbed, others negative. As Professor Vorster could not

respond to all the reactions individually, this meeting was arranged so that the matter could be discussed, criticism (positive and negative) articulated and Professor Vorster allowed to clarify his position.

After the symposium, Professor Deist released a press statement (Deist 1977:1-2) in which he summarised the proceedings. The reactions expressed at the symposium centred mainly on two issues - the comparison between the Bible and *Kennis van die aand*, and his purported statement that the virgin birth was a gynaecological impossibility. Vorster replied that he never stated that the New Testament was like *Kennis van die aand*, but only that the New Testament should be read as literature. Although the Bible is the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit must guide us in interpreting Scripture, it should still be read in a scientific way. He never rejected the virgin birth - he confessed his belief in it every Sunday in church. He also stated his concern that people reacted so vehemently to a newspaper report about his inaugural lecture, without reading the text of the lecture. He concluded by confessing that he was a Christian and a child of God - but that this did not release him from his obligation to interpret the Bible for his own generation in a scholarly way.

The Dutch Reformed Church responded according to its laws. Professor Vorster received a letter from the secretary of the classis of Lyttelton, Rev A Gerber (now a Conservative Party MP), the body which had supervision over the conduct and doctrine of Vorster because he was living within the boundaries of that classis. In this letter he stated that rumours were circulating about a deviation from sound doctrine by Vorster. These rumours had now been substantiated in writing, and Vorster was summoned to appear before the classis on Saturday 29 October 1977 according to the prescriptions of Articles 90.3 and 90.5 of the constitution of the church. The rumour was that his doctrine was not in line with the Reformed Confessions of Faith concerning the following doctrines:

- (a) the Virgin birth
- (b) the Divine origin of the Bible
- (c) that it is not important whether the historical facts of the Bible were true.

When Vorster arrived at this investigation, he was surprised to find two of his previous colleagues, Rev Christo Saayman and Professor F J Botha, acting as witnesses to his heresy. After a thorough investigation Professor Vorster declared publicly that he believed in the virgin birth, accepted the divine origin of the Bible, and believed that the basic facts of the New Testament were true. Thereby the rumour was refuted. The executive committee of the classis, in a

letter dated 30 October 1977, officially declared the rumours to be false, and requested Professor Vorster to make a public statement about his beliefs in that regard. Vorster again issued a press release, thus complying with the demands of the church.

There is no doubt that this run of events was damaging to Vorster's local image, but it also was bad publicity for the University. It must have had a negative effect on the Faculty of Theology - how much is difficult to assess. On 12 July 1977 the dean of faculty, Professor D J Bosch, received a letter from Dr R K Eyck, chairman and director of studies of the Full Gospel Church in South Africa, in which he asked for clarification on the faculty's views on Scripture. He asked whether the views expressed by Vorster were the accepted views of faculty. He needed this information for a report to the meeting of his church, and for clarity on how he should advise them on the continuation of links between his church's students and Unisa. An abstract from the dean's answer reads: Professor Vorster is a confessing Christian like you and I and he is not afraid to confess it. I would like to mention that he was never in doubt about the authority of the Bible, but that he is seeking for a meaningful use and interpretation of the Bible in our present situation. I have no doubt that there are differences of opinion between him and some of his colleagues, even at the University of South Africa. But I am convinced that these differences are of such a nature that believing Christians could discuss them in a meaningful way.

The Moderator of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, in a letter dated 5 August 1977, also expressed his concern about the tendency in the inaugural lecture that cast doubt on the authority of the Bible. If these 'concerns' really had any effect on the enrolment of students from these churches, or for that matter all the 'evangelical' churches, might be a very important subject to research.

THE TAR-AND-FEATHER EPISODE

In 1978-9 the Department of Systematic Theology paid intensive attention to the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg. His works were prescribed and students received guidance on how to understand his theology. The same kind of action was followed by the Dogmatic Society of South Africa. Systematic theologians all over the country met periodically to discuss one of Pannenberg's books or discuss one of the themes from his theology. Eventually it was decided to hold a congress at Unisa from 28 to 30 March 1979 with a theme from Pannenberg's theology. The theme decided on was: 'The meaning of history', because Pannenberg, in his theology, distinguishes between secular and salvation history.

The dogmatists wanted to pay attention to the interpretation of history, with possible reference to examples from South African history such as the battle of Blood River. They planned the congress to be an experiment in interdisciplinary dialogue. Specialists from different disciplines such as history, philosophy, political science, education and theology, representing different ethnic groups, were involved either as speakers or respondents.

The organisers succeeded in arranging for Pannenberg to visit South Africa and to deliver two papers at the conference. The programme looked impressive: 'A historical mirror of Blood River' (Professor F A van Jaarsveld); 'The meaning of history - probing the problem' (Professor P S Dreyer); 'Which bed for Goldilocks - an essay on values and the historian' (Professor J R H Davenport); 'On interpreting the history of Afrikaner political thinking - some problems and issues' (Dr A du Toit); 'The place of history and history teaching in our educational system' (Professor R E van der Ross); 'God in history - an unresolved problem' (Professor J J F Durand); 'The concept of God in the historical explanation. A statement on Wolfhart Pannenberg's theology of history' (Dr C M L Villa-Vicencio). Pannenberg's lectures would have been the cherry on the top at a congress that really promised to be an in-depth inquiry into a very relevant issue. To help Pannenberg in his preparation for the congress, they decided to supply him with questions that cropped up during the discussion of his books. Unfortunately some of these questions disturbed Pannenberg to such an extent that he cancelled his visit to South Africa a week or two before the congress.

The chairman of the congress, Professor A König, feared that the withdrawal of Pannenberg would cause people to lose interest in the congress. He thought it wise to 'leak' some controversial parts of Professor Floors van Jaarsveld's lecture to a Sunday newspaper in an effort to encourage people to attend. It worked like a bomb. Unfortunately some people attended whom they did not bargain on.

Sister Marie-Henry Keane was the secretary, waiting at the entrance to the Senate Hall for late registrations. She could not believe her eyes when about forty men, clad in khaki clothes, entered the building and headed for the Senate Hall. She spread her arms in front of the door, and in her most formal Irish told them: 'You may not enter. You have not registered.' For a moment they hesitated, then regained their confidence, pushed her through the swing doors and entered the hall.

At that moment Professor Van Jaarsveld was at the podium busy with his paper in which he argued that the Day of the Covenant - the Afrikaner's celebration of their victory over Dingaan's armies at Blood River on 16 December 1838 - ought not to be treated as a Sunday. He had checked the documents and discovered that the vow which is read every year is not the same as the one made by the Voortrekkers before the battle. In the original vow it was never promised the day would be celebrated as a Sabbath, as is promised in the versions read in our time. He suggested that the day should be an ordinary holiday without religious connotations. Non-Afrikaners should be allowed to do what they like on that day. Cinemas and theatres should be open and people should be allowed to take part in sport.

He was only seven minutes into his paper when he became aware of a large crowd of people coming into the hall. As a seasoned professor he thought they were late-comers to the lecture. But suddenly they grabbed him, held his arms apart and tried to force open his jacket. While they held him in a crucifixion position they splashed tar from a can and poured it into his face, and over his shirt and jacket. Eugene Terre'blanche, the leader, cracked his sjambok a few times and moved to the microphone, while some of his escorts unfurled a huge 'Vierkleur' (flag). Then he announced that he was from the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (I think this was their very first public action), and that their actions were a protest against the vilification of Afrikaner tradition. He read out a statement that was drawn up by the 'Groot Raad' of the AWB and signed by the secretary of the movement, J J Groenewald. He left this official document on the table: It read: 'We as young Afrikaners are tired of seeing spiritual traditions and everything that is sacred to the Afrikaner desecrated and degraded by liberal politicians, dissipated academics and false prophets who hide under the mantle of learning and a false faith - just as Professor Floors van Jaarsveld now, at this symposium, attacks the sanctity of the Afrikaner in its deepest essence This standpoint draws a line through the significance of the Afrikaner's history and is blasphemous' (*Sunday Times*, 1 April 1979). While all this was happening the Principal, Professor van Wijk, who had delivered the opening address, quietly slipped out of the hall and phoned the police. When someone shouted that the police were coming the objectors moved out and went back to the Voortrekker Monument where they thanked God for the success of their mission.

The damage to the Senate Hall was in excess of R4 000 and ten members of the AWB appeared in court on charges of trespassing on Unisa property, assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm to Professor van Jaarsveld, crimen injuria for tarring and feathering Professor van Jaarsveld, and malicious damage to property. They all pleaded guilty. They admitted that they had

decided to tar and feather Professor van Jaarsveld at a gathering at the Voortrekker Monument, where they had discussed their plan of action. They were found guilty on the charges of *crimen injuria* and malicious damage to property for soiling a cement slab, a carpet, a chair, the podium and a microphone with tar. Giving evidence in mitigation, Terre'blanche said: 'The Day of the Covenant was being questioned. When a subject like this is discussed, I know it is a leftist assault.' J J Groenewald said that he had gained the impression that Professor van Jaarsveld was a historian who was moving outside his field and doubting the holiness of the Covenant. He interprets history in terms of the present and not on the grounds of mere historical facts, in order to make provision for other nationalities. He saw the symposium as an assault on the Afrikaner, because they were putting the Day of the Covenant on stage before a multi-racial audience (*The Citizen*, 27 June 1979).

The AWB men were fined R7 200 or 3 700 days' imprisonment. It is said that a rich farmer came forward and paid the fine on their behalf (*Pretoria News*, 14 May 1979).

IN POLITICAL STORMS

The Faculty of Theology takes great pride in the fact that it is an open faculty and that the only criterion for appointment of staff is academic excellence. This principle is very idealistic and not always so easy to maintain, and it has far-reaching consequences. The fact that it is teaching ecumenical theology makes it inevitable that the convictions of the members of faculty will cover the whole spectrum of political as well as theological views. The critics of the faculty often do not keep in mind that you cannot tag the pronouncements of a section of faculty to the faculty at large.

The logical consequence of this is inevitably that there will be members of staff opposed to the political policies of the government. I have mentioned that some of the NGK theologians accepted posts at Unisa because their political pronouncements made them unacceptable to the curatories of their own church. As the faculty developed, theologians from the English-speaking section of the community were appointed to the faculty. Some of them had strong anti-government convictions. A third factor to be kept in mind is the appointment of 'Black' members of staff, who, by the nature of South African politics, would see the political issues from a totally different perspective.

Then there is a purely theological factor which played a role in the theological faculty's getting involved in politics - the rise of social ethics. Ever since Kant, ethics has become a very important component of modern theology and in this century sociology has become the dominant human science. It is only natural that social ethics was to become a very important component of the theological curricula of faculty. It is no surprise to note how many articles of a socio-political nature appeared in *Theologia Evangelica* since the early seventies - 'The co-responsibility of churches for the future of society' (B O Johanson); 'Labour legitimation' (J S Kruger); 'Justification and social justice' (H Lederle); 'Theology and soot?!' (W J C Cilliers); 'Theology as a response to social change' (J S Kruger); 'The church and politics' (A König); 'Welfare and how it is measured - the concern of both church and state' (L Hulley); 'Evangelism and social transformation' (D J Bosch).

Members of faculty signed public statements with very clear political implications. One of the lecturers kindly supplied me with a list of all the statements with political overtones that he had signed: The well-known 'Ope brief' (Open letter) which 123 ministers of the NGK signed in asking for change (1982); another 'Ope brief' in support of Dr C Villa-Vicencio (1982) - we will go into this in detail; a press release in reaction to the refusal of the church council of the NGK congregation Universiteitsoord, to make their communion glasses available for a eucharist in which 'Black' Christians would participate (1983); the Kairos document (1985); an open letter to voters not to participate in the municipal elections of 1987; The Road to Damascus (1989) and a letter of protest to the Principal because of his remarks on and handling of the bus boycott (1989).

For many people it is a puzzling question why some theologians are always in the vanguard of everything that smells of politics. They feel that theologians should keep themselves busy with spiritual matters and leave politics to the politicians. Is that a sound judgement? Has Christ nothing to say about our earthly existence?

The events surrounding the promotion of Dr C Villa-Vicencio are a very good example of theologians' involvement in politics. Before he joined the staff of Unisa, Charles Villa-Vicencio served several congregations of the Methodist Church and then proceeded to the United States where he earned a PhD at Drew University. Then he was the Superintendent Minister of the Inner City Mission in Cape Town. There he had to minister to people who suffered

under the apartheid laws. Shortly before he joined Unisa, he published a booklet, *The theology of apartheid*, in which he gave a historico-critical account of the development of the theology that had backed up the apartheid policy of the government. He wrote:

Unless we have gone out of our minds, we as a people of this land will begin to put wrong right. Whatever fantasies some white South Africans may have about being God's chosen, it is well to remember His wrath was not compromised against his chosen but disobedient people Israel, nor against the Holy City of Jerusalem (Amos 2:4ff; Isaiah 1:10-20; Jeremiah 5:20-29) nor will it be compromised against us (Luke 12:4-5). To defend an immoral policy that arbitrarily inflicts suffering on people because of the colour of their skins is a rebellion against God.

(Villa-Vicencio 1977:24)

In 1979 the head of his department recommended to the Executive Committee of Senate that he be granted a three-notch increase in his salary. His publications were mentioned as part of the motivation. I mention the list of publications, because all of them were of an anti-government political character: *The theology of apartheid*; *Theology and politics in South Africa*; *Theologized nationalism*; *The Babylonian captivity of the Church* and *Is the ghost of Cottesloe still with us?* The increase was granted (Minutes of the E C of Senate 1979:3319). In 1980 the selection committee for Systematic Theology, Theological Ethics and Practical Theology unanimously recommended that Dr H J C Pieterse (Practical Theology) and Dr C Villa-Vicencio (Theological Ethics) be promoted to associate professorships. The Executive Committee of Senate recommended accordingly (Minutes of the E C of Senate 1980:2519). At the September meeting of Council it was decided that the promotions in this department be carried over to the agenda of the November meeting (Minutes of Council 1980:1120).

At the November meeting Council resolved:

1. That the promotion and appointment of senior staff in this department be held over until 1981.
2. That vacancies again be advertised and applications awaited.
3. That applications considered during 1980 be reconsidered in 1981.

4. That in the case where staff, who qualified for promotion during 1980, are promoted during 1981, the possible leeway in salary be taken into consideration.

(Minutes of Council 1980:1400)

At the first meeting of Council in February 1981 the matter was raised again and Council resolved that a committee be appointed 'to go into all the aspects of the situation and report back to Council'. The committee consisted of the Principal (convenor), Drs A J Koen, P M Robbertse, E F Potgieter and Professor Marinus Wiechers (Minutes of Council, 25 February 1981). At the next meeting it was decided that Professor M Wiechers should 'remain a member of the committee after 31 May 1981' - probably because his term of service as representative of Senate expired on that date (Minutes of Council, 1 April 1981).

On the 3 June 1981 it was decided unanimously that:

1. Dr H J C Pieterse be promoted to associate professor, effective from 1 October 1980, with the normal adjustments.
2. Dr C Villa-Vicencio be promoted to associate professor on 1 July 1981 with the normal adjustments.

(Minutes of Council: 3 June 1981)

All I could deduce from the minutes of Council was that the problem revolved round Dr Villa-Vicencio - nothing more! I had to turn to the newspaper clippings in the archives to reconstruct (their version of) the story: According to the newspaper reports the root of all evil was a statement made by Villa-Vicencio on one of the most sensitive issues in South African politics - support for the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). He had attended a WCC consultation on racism in the Netherlands as a delegate of the SA Council of Churches. In an interview with *Elsevier*, the Dutch weekly, he ascribed the grants by PCR of the WCC to Swapo as 'a gesture of brotherly solidarity'. He stated that the money was to be used for humanitarian purposes. He was attacked for this in editorials and reports in some of the pro-government newspapers. He replied that the SACC did not justify violence, that Christians had to express love and help to people 'caught on both sides of the struggle, that the SACC delegation had abstained from voting, and that he opposed violence. It was on this issue that 'the Broederbond-backed establishment on the council was opposed to his promotion' (*Ecunews* 1981:7).

The council referred the issue back to the selection committee who stood by their recommendation unanimously, and the executive committee of faculty confronted the Principal and demanded that he state unequivocally whether Unisa was a free and open multi-racial institution, or whether it remained an Afrikaner Nationalist-dominated institution (*Ecunews* 1981:7). The Principal then raised another reason for the council's decision - break in the confidentiality of the matter. While this issue was still under discussion, he received a letter from Rev Cyril Wilkens, the general secretary of the Methodist Church of South Africa, in which he mentioned the use made by his church of Unisa's Faculty of Divinity in the training of ministers, and how pleased he was to hear of Dr Villa-Vicencio's promotion. The Principal saw this as a leak of confidential information and an attempt to influence the University's decision when considering the matter (*Sunday Times*, 7 December 1980). When Council finally gave way, it was described as 'a victory for academic freedom at the University' (*The Star*, 24 July 1981).

It is difficult to assess all the complications of this confrontation. It sparked off a worsening relationship between the Principal and the senior members of the theological faculty (*Ecunews* 1981:7) which lasted quite a few years and most probably did not enhance the position of faculty in the hierarchy of the University. I suppose one could draw the conclusion that this row did the image of the University in some quarters no good either, and must have had an effect on the fund-raising efforts of the Department of Development.