CHAPTER 6

Towards the new South Africa

After thirty years of existence the Faculty of Theology at Unisa can look back on some remarkable achievements. Although it is the smallest faculty in the University, it is the largest theological faculty in the country. It consists of 123 members of staff of whom 78 are in permanent posts and 45 are temporary members of staff. In 1989 it had no fewer than 1,268 students enrolled for one or more of the theological subjects - mostly Biblical Studies. Of these students 999 were busy with their first degree in theology. Four students were busy with their BD degree on postgraduate level. There were no fewer than 285 postgraduate students of whom 96 were busy with honours, 69 with master’s and 120 with doctoral degrees.

Up until 1989 the University of South Africa had conferred 36 lower diplomas in theology, 561 BTh degrees, 237 honours, 22 BD, 74 master’s and 100 doctoral degrees. The staff have not only pulled their weight in their tutorial duties, but they have also excelled in research. No less than 19.9% of the articles published by Unisa members of staff in recognised magazines during the past few years have come from the pens (and word-processors) of members of

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the theological faculty. The university recognised excellence of service by awarding special merit status to 16 of its senior professors last year, and of them no fewer than four were professors in theology. If I may say so, at least four of the others must have come close to being recognised as well.

This is indeed a well-equipped team to face the challenges of the future. But although staff excellence is a blessing under normal circumstances, the present economic crisis aggravates what I would call the not uncommon tension caused by the academic and natural 'generation gap'. Many of the highly qualified young lecturers are experiencing a severe economic squeeze. Most of them are at the age when family life puts high demands on young parents. Many of them wisely bought their own homes when money was freely available and interest rates low. The sharp rise in interest rates on home loans today causes great anxiety and unbearable economic pressure. What can they do to make ends meet? The harder they work to improve their qualifications and the more they plead for some financial relief, the greater become their frustrations. A reported remark by one of the senior members of the Cabinet to the effect that Unisa staff do not deserve a pay rise because they only work half a day (office hours are from 7:45 till 13:00 on weekdays) did not improve the situation. How on earth they ask, can he be ignorant of all the hours of toil put in at home during afternoons and evenings? With the subsidy system applied to universities, very little can be done by the university authorities themselves to alleviate their plight. The only way out is promotion, but most senior colleagues are a decade or more away from retirement. It is under this kind of circumstance that 'unnatural' tensions develop in a faculty.

The future holds another form of uncertainty. There is no ecclesiastical 'conveyer-belt' that keeps on supplying students to the faculty. Students who enrol at Unisa do so out of their own choice. How this happens, why they prefer to study at Unisa and who they are, needs some serious research. Our dean, Professor Burden, and Mrs Millard of the Department of Church History did some exploratory research on the students of Biblical Studies and Church History respectively, which will be published in due course. I gratefully make use of some of their research findings:

The survey of the 1989 student body in the Department of Church History produced the following statistics:
Of these students 34 first-year students, 21 second-years and 19 third-years gave their occupation as ‘religious worker’. There were also 20 first-year, five second-year and four third-year students who were teachers.

Professor Burden found that in 1986 men made up 47,8% and women 52,2% of the enrolment for Biblical Studies, while in 1987 the percentages were 49,5% and 50,5% respectively. Religious workers constituted 2,9% of the enrolment in 1986 and 3,3% in 1987. Teachers have by far the largest representation in this department, making up 71,8% of the numbers in 1986 and 69,7% in 1987.

This is a very superficial insight into our ‘market’. What does the future hold for this faculty? The words of Professor Lombard were never more true than today. Our faculty’s future depends so much on the way we analyse our situation as well as the future. On 27 September 1989 the faculty held a symposium in which departments had to answer the question of their own relevance. From what was said there, or told by heads of departments, or written elsewhere, I have tried to compile a synopsis of how the different departments see the future and what they are doing to comply with future demands:

The departments of Old and New Testament. I was told by members of these departments that the article by W S Vorster (1987:374-394) gives a very good indication of the position of these two departments. Both departments are moving towards a post-critical stage in which the holistic paradigm will be
dominant. The Biblical sciences are aware that ‘facts’ are theory-dependent. There are no literary facts - they all exist within interpretive frameworks (paradigms) that change through the centuries.

The emphasis has shifted from the author and his circumstances to the text and the reader. The text is viewed as a holistic object and a system of signs in a communication process. The text thus obtains an epistemic status, and therefore the epistemology of the two testaments falls into structuralistic, narrative and rhetorical interpretations. On the other hand the reception theories prove beyond doubt the subjective character of our interpretation of the Bible. There is interaction between the reader and the text, which explains why no consensus could be reached on the interpretation of certain texts. It is an open question whether the reception theory will not even enlarge this tendency. It is clear that great changes are taking place, which will effect Biblical sciences fundamentally. Vorster believes that they are moving away from the historicocritical paradigm but are as yet still in a pre-paradigm stage in which the holistic approach is playing a major role. These sciences might end up in a post-industrialised concept of reality.

Missiology believes that its relevance lies in the concept contextualisation, where all the urgent issues of human development and justice are brought into discussion. To put contextual missiology into practice, three aspects of the utmost importance are:

* A clear understanding of history so that conscientisation can take place and the liberating aspect can be introduced;
* A continual movement between action and reflection;
* A continual movement between text and context.

All this is possible only after a thorough analysis of society is made. In this respect other social sciences can make a valuable contribution, but missiologists must do their own empirical research to enable them to make their own analysis. Missiology must also be in constant but critical dialogue with missiologists elsewhere. This we can call the ecumenical dimension, because we need the input of the rest of the ecumene. Lastly, the incarnational character of the gospel must drive us to an involvement in the lives of people and a commitment in situations of conflict.
paid to the theological point of departure - the communicative processes by which God comes into and changes the lives of persons. Secondly, the basic ecclesiastical theories on communication are studied - their anthropologies and their views on communal life, etc. Thirdly, attention is given to different theories of how this communication takes place. Here students study theories on preaching, on liturgy, on the caring of the flock, etc. Then they create new models to communicate the reality of the Kingdom to our age as well as the age to come (Pieterse 1981:142-156).

Church History. The main objective of this department is to describe the history of the church from an ecumenical perspective. In the field of South African Church History this called for a pioneer spirit. At the conference Professor Pillay pointed out that relevance should be seen in a wider perspective than the demands of economics, and social and political principles. Knowledge has an intrinsic value, deepening self-awareness and self-understanding. The insights of theology in general, and Church History in particular, are indispensable to society. By being critical we can preserve the integrity of our goals and engender Christian self-understanding. The church historian faces the problem of how to exegete historical traditions and to demystify our historical heritage, and in doing this, has to overcome the problems of selectivity and perspective propagation. Theology must always be contextualisation - we must place our own context in continual dialogue with the Bible. The church historian must supply the history of that dialogue over the past two thousand years, and like a psychoanalyst unfold layer upon layer of beliefs, memories, phobias, unfulfilled wishes, fantasies, etc. He must also bring the different contextual perspectives into dialogue, enhancing the dialogue text-context, which will happen continually in the South Africa of the next century.

CONCLUSION

In the Faculty of Theology at Unisa it is not a denomination or a curatory or the dean that determines the course and content of the theology taught, but the separate departments. Naturally the head of department plays a key role. After reading the aims and goals of the various departments, one thing stands out loud and clear: Unisa has no theology, they are only doing theology. From outside its reports may seem like reports of the World Council of Churches - more or less every perspective is raised. There is no unanimity but continual dialogue - Quot homines tot sententiae!
Never were Professor Lombard's words more true:

The theology of Unisa is called to stand in the university amongst all other sciences, exposed and vulnerable, because it does not apply the general apriories and categories - because then we will have to return to the theology of the nineteenth century. We must continue to do our work modestly, not to rule but to serve ... a precarious undertaking. It is dangerous because it finds its real essence in becoming redundant. And yet it is a beautiful science - the most beautiful of them all, effusing itself and going up in the lumen gloriae.

(Lombard 1960:53)

One would wish this to be the ultimate future of this faculty!
List of members of faculty, (temporary and permanent), 1990

DEPARTMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT

Prof J A Loader
Dr J Annandale
Mr D Barnard
Mr W S Boshoff
Prof H L Bosman
Prof J J Burden
Dr J A Burger
Prof F E Deist
Dr I G P Gous
Dr M Heyns
Mrs F Klopper
Mrs R Nel

Mr W A G Nel
Mrs A Pieters
Mrs M Rootman
Dr C L v W Scheepers
Dr E H Scheffler
Mr G Snyman
Dr I J J Spangenberg
Dr J G Strydom
Mrs F van der Spek
Prof P J van Dyk
Dr S W van Heerden
Mnr J P H Wessels
Prof W J Wessels

DEPARTMENT OF NEW TESTAMENT

Prof E A C Pretorius
Mr P R Bosman
Mr J E Botha
Mr P J J Botha

Mr C R le Roux
Prof H A Lombard
Mr W H Oliver
Prof J H Roberts
Mr P F Craffert
Ds J C de Klerk
Prof I J du Plessis
Dr J Engelbrecht
Mr P J Gräbe
Prof P J Hartin
Mrs M M Jacobs
Mrs C E T Kourie
Dr H R Lemmer

Mr C W Schnell
Dr W A Sebothoma
Mr G J Steyn
Mr J Steyn
Mr G A van den Heever
Mrs J M Viljoen
Mr J N Vorster
Mrs H J Winter

INSTITUTE FOR THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Prof W S Vorster
Mrs L Bedingfield
Mrs J M C Fouché
Mrs J Kilian
Mrs N Muir
Prof F A Swanepoel
Mrs P van der Merwe
Mrs I Victor
Rev A H Anderson
Mr J A C Bosman
Mr A S Combrinck
Mr J H Conradie

Mr M C Gerber
Mr J P T Koen
Mr J Liebenberg
Mr F A Meyer
Mrs J M Nel
Mrs M D Robbertze
Miss J H Rykheer
Mrs H Schoeman
Mr H Schoombie
Mrs G Theron
Mr J Trollip
Mr I A van Tonder

DEPARTMENT OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

Prof A König
Mr A Blom
Mrs A Cronje
Dr C W du Toit
Rev S Fourie
Prof L D Hulley
Prof M-H Keane
Prof H I Lederle

Prof S S Maimela
Dr T Mofokeng
Rev Z Mokgoebu
Rev I E Nghatsane
Ds D Olivier
Mrs M Opperman
Ds J F van Heerden
Dr E van Niekerk
DEPARTMENT OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Prof J A Wolfaardt
Prof J T de Jongh van Arkel
Dr J S Dreyer
Ds J J Gerber
Rev M Hestenes
Prof L M Heyns

Prof H J C Pieterse
Ds G J le Roux
Dr E Tema
Dr J P J Theron
Mev D van Eeden
Dr A G van Wyk

DEPARTMENT OF CHURCH HISTORY

Prof C J Botha
Prof J W Hofmeyr
Prof G J Pillay
Dr C Landman

Dr G Frank
Mrs J Millard
Mrs A Smit

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIOLOGY

Prof D J Bosch
Rev D Balia
Dr N Botha
Prof M L Dancel
Mr A G S Gous

Mr S T W Hayes
Dr J N J Kritzinger
Prof W A Saayman
Mrs H T van Rensburg
Mrs M Willemse

DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE OF RELIGION

Prof J S Krüger
Mrs D M Eicker
Mr D P Goosen
Miss G Kooverjee

Prof C du P le Roux
Ds G J A Lubbe
Mrs H C Steyn
Dr S Thorpe

SECRETARY OF FACULTY

Mrs M Robinson

HUGUENOT COLLEGE

Prof P R van Dyk

SUBJECT LIBRARIANS

Ms M Strassner
Ms C Zeelie

Ms E Burger
Ms S Botha
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