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INTERVIEW WITH FANIE SNYMAN

Lodewyk Sutton

LS: *How do you feel at this stage of your life?*

FS: I can honestly say that I have an overwhelming sense of sincere gratitude. I have been privileged to spend more than three decades at a university where there were so many opportunities that presented themselves to be followed. I never grew tired of preparing and delivering lectures, trying to keep abreast of the latest research, writing and reading papers, attending congresses and being part of the guild of Old Testament scholars in South Africa and abroad.

LS: *Biographical: Brief overview of aspects such as childhood, schooling, university.*

FS: I completed primary school in Kempton Park and matriculated at Sannieshof High School in the North-West province. I did my undergraduate studies at the University of Johannesburg and then moved to the University of Pretoria where I studied theology, obtaining a BD degree, Postgraduate Diploma in Theology and eventually a DD in Old Testament.

LS: *Why the interest in theology? Why this particular discipline?*

FS: During my high-school years, I was pretty much sure that I would study

law to become a lawyer, but gradually theology became an option and by the end of my high-school career I was convinced to study theology and become a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. Once I enrolled at the University of Pretoria, I knew it was the right thing to do. I really immersed myself in all the disciplines in theology as everything was so interesting to me!

Looking back, I think there were two major factors contributing to my interest in the Old Testament. The one was plain curiosity. I asked myself why there were so few sermons from the Old Testament, while it makes up the major part of the canon of Scriptures. So, I started reading the Old Testament and as the saying goes, I was hooked! The intriguing stories, the psalms, the wisdom literature and the prophetic literature just triggered my interest. Secondly, it was especially prof. W.S. (Riempies) Prinsloo who, as an inspiring lecturer, kindled my initial interest even further. His well-prepared and interesting way of presenting lectures, high standards and scientific approach to the Old Testament appealed to me and eventually I did my doctoral degree under his supervision.

LS: Focus of academic interest? Developments in your views?

FS: The Old Testament is a vast collection of literature. One has to make a choice. I chose the latter prophets, in particular, the so-called minor prophets or the Book of the Twelve, as it is called nowadays. Focusing on different books within the corpus of the Book of the Twelve made it possible to study these books in depth.

I started to study the Old Testament in the heydays of the so-called synchronic method. Gradually, the conviction came that one cannot study a collection of documents as old as the Old Testament is, ignoring the historical dimension of these texts. The more I studied the Old Testament, the more I realized that it is a very human book, written by, and addressed to human beings. At the same time, the Old Testament is part of the canon of Scriptures in the church where God revealed Himself to us. I also discovered that the interpretation of the Old Testament never ends. New insights, new approaches, and new methods always challenge current interpretations.

LS: Involvement with the church?

FS: I studied theology with the aim of becoming a minister of religion which I did when I became a pastor of the Dutch Reformed

Church Nelspruit-Suid in Mpumalanga. Over the years, I kept an interest in the church and was privileged to serve in various capacities in the DRC at local, regional and national level. I never thought of myself as “an ivory tower” type of theologian and, therefore, it was important for me to keep close contact with the church.

LS: Highlights of deanship and experiences of changes at the university during your academic career?

FS: To be a dean of a faculty is not easy. One enters the office of the dean with virtually no experience, while everyone else within university structures assumes that you are on top of it in every respect! Within university structures, a dean serves as a kind of mediator. A dean represents a faculty at meetings of top management, while at the same time s/he represents top management at faculty level.

There were a couple of achievements during my term as dean, and the following comes to mind:

- We completed probably the most comprehensive recirculation exercise in the history of the faculty.
- We started with the annual Tutu-Jonker Prestige Lecture, the first one which was held in October 2017.
- We inaugurated the Letsema Award where we give recognition to people who made a significant contribution to church and society.
- We launched a new scientific series, UFS Theological Explorations, providing staff members and other theologians with a new avenue to publish research results in an accredited publication.
- A weekly discussion forum called Faculty Academic Discussions (FAD) was started to stimulate academic discussion across traditional subject lines.
- We hosted a congress in conjunction with Yale Divinity School in August 2017.
- On a structural level, the name of the faculty was changed to the Faculty of Theology and Religion, while seven departments were restructured into four different departments, resulting in a new synergy between different subject fields in theology.

On a personal level, the deans' colloquium in 2015 brought together, for the first time ever, Deans of Theology from theological institutions in Africa and Europe for discussions of mutual interests. This was an important highlight. To be awarded the UFS Prestige Scholar Book Prize in 2017 for the commentary on the book of Malachi was a wonderful surprise and highlight in my career.

Whatever accomplishments there were, it must be emphasized that a dean can only make things happen with the support of staff members. It was a team effort by dedicated staff members who put time and energy in the faculty in order to achieve change and innovation.

LS: *Plans for retirement?*

FS: Retirement is indeed a turning point in life. As is the case with other turning points in life, one can never be fully prepared for it. I am excited to start working on a commentary on the books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah to be published by InterVarsity Press in Cambridge, UK. That will keep me occupied for at least the next year. Then, of course, there are still a few avenues I want to explore in the Old Testament, resulting in publications.

On a more personal level, it will be wonderful not to have to attend endless meetings! My wife and I are both fond of travelling. We would like to visit places we have not been to before. I look forward to spending more time with my wife, children and grandchildren and live life in a more relaxed mode.

LIST OF RESEARCH OUTPUTS

1979-1983

Daniël 9-12, 'n struktuur-analitiese ondersoek. Ongepubliseerde M.A.-verhandeling. Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit.

Die boodskap van die boek Maleagi, 'n sinchroniese ondersoek. Ongepubliseerde B.D.-skripsie. Universiteit van Pretoria.

Die lidmaat en sy persoonlike Bybelstudie. *Die Kerkbode* 29 Augustus 1979:276-277.

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1984

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1985

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1986

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1987

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1988

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1989

Abraham-avontuur. Pretoria: Daan Retief Uitgewers.

Cohesion in the Book of Obadiah. *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 101(1):59-71.

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1990

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1991

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1992

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2003

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2004

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Die Boek Joël. In: D. Human & H. van Rooy, *Die Multivertaling Bybel* (Vereeniging: CUM).

Die Boek Amos. In: D. Human & H. van Rooy, *Die Multivertaling Bybel* (Vereeniging: CUM).

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2005

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2006

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2007

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2008

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2009

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2011

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