

# THE HISTORY OF THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA: A DUTCH REFORMED PERSPECTIVE 1938–2008

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## ABSTRACT

In 1938 the Faculty of Theology Section B was established at the University of Pretoria, which could be likened to a small fountain. As the fountain flowed through the decades of history, it grew and became a river that made a huge impact on the university, the Church and society. The aim of this article, coinciding with the centenary of the University of Pretoria, is to focus on the positive contribution of the Faculty of Theology towards university, church and society. Like any river it went through different stages. There were times of peace and tranquillity, but also times of raging rapids. At certain stages of growth and development both lecturers and students made a huge impact, playing leading roles in Church and society, clearly voicing the call of the Church. The voice of the Faculty was not always welcome and was at times met by strong reaction, which was possibly one of the reasons for the murder of Prof. J.A. Heyns. In 2000 a new era dawned when the stream that became a river was joined by streams of different denominations. This made the river even stronger, with much more impact. This article tells the story of the origin, growth and struggle of the Dutch Reformed Church at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria from 1938 to 2008.

## INTRODUCTION

*'Die 50-jarige bestaan van die Universiteit van Pretoria se Teologiese Fakulteit van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk was 'n belangrike en tegelyk heuglike herdenkingsfees.'* With these words, the former rector, Prof. D.M. Joubert, congratulated the Faculty of Theology Section B with its golden jubilee in 1988 (Joubert 1988:3). He also expressed the university's expectation for the road ahead by adding:

*Langs hierdie weg my allerbeste wense op die pad vorentoe. Die tweede skof op die pad na 'n eeufees. En soos dit in die Tweede Brief aan die Korinthiërs voorgehou word "En wat julle betref, het ons 'n vaste verwagting!"*

(Joubert 1988:3)

Now, twenty years later, during the centenary of the University of Pretoria, the question could be asked: 'Did the Faculty of Theology Section B rise to Prof D.M. Joubert's challenge?'

This question is best answered by using the metaphorical image of a river. A river springs as a small stream from a fountain and grows gradually to become a large river that nourishes the land through which it flows. Sometimes a river must flow through rapids before it reaches the peace and tranquillity of a lagoon.

The Faculty of Theology of the Dutch Reformed Church can be compared with a stream that sprung from a fountain seventy years ago. Within years the stream became a river that flowed stronger and stronger. It became a stream of living water, not only to the Dutch Reformed Church in the north of South Africa, but also to South African society as a whole. Flowing strongly through the landscape of time, it encountered several rapids. Although these were times of unrest they purified the river and contributed to the force of impact of the water on the University of Pretoria, the Dutch Reformed Church, and the whole of South Africa.

## THE RIVER ORIGINATES

The establishment of the Faculty of Theology of the Dutch Reformed Church at the University of Pretoria did not occur overnight. Drop by drop the water originated from its fountain, becoming a river over time. In the words of Dr W. Nicol: *'Die Teologiese fakulteit het lank geworstel in die skoot van die kerk voordat dit tot geboorte kon kom'* (Nicol 1946:7).

Already at the 11th synod of the Nederduitsch Hervormde of Gereformeerde Kerk van Zuid-Afrika, which took place in May 1916, two lecturers from the University of Pretoria pleaded for the establishment of a theological faculty at the university. However, the pleas of D.F. du Toit Malherbe and W.P. de Villiers were ignored and it was never discussed at the meeting (Nicol 1946:7).

Preceding the synod of 1919, the Board of the Transvaal Universiteitscollege, as the University of Pretoria was called then, wrote a letter to the Synodal Commission in which it requested the appointment of one or more professors in Theology. The answer of the Commission, as approved by the synod, shows clearly that the church did not have the same expectations. The Commission answered: *'dat er geen behoefte voor onze Kerk bestaat voor de oprichting van een of meer leerstoelen in verband met een Theologische Faculteit aan 't Transvaal Universiteitscollege'* (Handelinge 1919:18).

It was, however, not the end of the road. At the synod meeting of 1922, Rev. Paul Nel of Ermelo proposed that a commission be appointed to investigate different scenarios. The proposal was rejected by 88 votes against 50 (Handelinge 1922:62).

Like the continuous dripping of water from a fountain, pressure for the establishment of a faculty of theology in the north of the country kept mounting. Rapid change in society accelerated the

establishment of the faculty: the end of the First World War, industrialisation in the Transvaal and the accompanying urbanisation of many Afrikaners saw students greatly growing in number at the University of Pretoria (Van der Watt 1988:8).

The church could no longer ignore these events and in 1934 the synod made the watershed decision to investigate the possible establishment of a theological faculty at the University of Pretoria. The decision of the synod was communicated to congregations in a Pastoral Letter stating the following:

*Die sinode is daarvan oortuig dat die tyd nader kom dat die Transvaalse Kerk sy eie kerklike Professore sal moet aanstel by die Universiteit van Pretoria om te sorg vir die opleiding van ons eie predikante. 'n Besluit oor hierdie saak is met byna eenparige stemme geneem en 'n kommissie is aangestel wat ondersoek sal doen en ander voorbereidende werk in verband met hierdie onderneming verrig. Waar ons voorheen gevees het dat hierdie kwessie 'n oorsaak van verwydering kon word, moet ons met dankbaarheid getuig dat die bespreking daarvan veel gehelp het om die gees van liefde en samewerking in ons kerk te bevorder.*

(Handelinge 1934:373)

The members of the commission appointed by the synod were Rev. W. Nicol, Rev. J.I. de Wet, Dr J.H. Eybers, Rev. Paul Nel, Rev. J.H.M. Stofberg, Rev. P. van der Hoven and Rev. G.D. Worst (Verslag 1937:1). The commission was instructed to negotiate with the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape 'om also tot 'n goeie verstandhouding te kom en die eenheid en samewerking te behou', and with the University of Pretoria 'oor die nodige reëlings'. It also had the task of informing congregations in the Transvaal about the process and finding ways to raise funds for the establishment of the faculty. The possibility of state funding was also to be investigated (Verslag 1937:2). The report of the commission was published six months before the synod was to meet in 1937 and it proposed that the Church should proceed with establishing a new faculty of theology in the Transvaal: 'Die Kommissie [beveel] met die meeste vrymoedigheid [aan] dat die Kerk nou daartoe sal oorgaan om voorsiening te maak vir die opleiding van Predikante aan die Universiteit van Pretoria' (Verslag 1937:23).

After much debate the proposals were put to the synod on 16 April 1937. The synod decided with 139 votes against 68 that 'die Kerk nou daartoe sal oorgaan om voorsiening te maak vir die opleiding van predikante aan die Universiteit van Pretoria' (Handelinge 1937:54).

After dinner the meeting took an important turn when the minister for Wolmaransstad made a declaration on behalf of the 68 members that voted against the proposals. The declaration (Handelinge 1937:55) read as follows:

1. Ons gee nie onse beginsels prys nie.
2. Ons buig onder die besluit van die Sinode ter wille van onse Koning van die Kerk.
3. Ons onderneem om, so ver in ons vermoë is, die uitvoering van die besluit te bevorder.'

In what Van der Watt (1988:12) describes as an emotional highlight, the meeting spontaneously burst into prayer, after which they sang the following hymn:

*'Verlosten, juicht! Hebt Jesus lief,  
Dat wij ons zaam in dat gevoel vereenen  
Laat dankbaarheid aan zijne voete weenen  
Wie, wie verdient die tranen, zoo als Hij?'*

(Gesang 65:4)

The road was now clear for the establishment of a Faculty of Theology in the Transvaal. On 9 December 1937 the Theological Faculty Commission gathered in the *Voortrekkergedenksaal* in Pretoria to nominate the persons to be appointed as professors by the board of the University of Pretoria. G.M. Pellissier was appointed professor in Dogmatics and Missionary Sciences, E.P. Groenewald professor in New Testament, D.J. Keet professor in Church History and J.H. Kritzing professor in Old Testament (Van der Watt 1988:13).

On 16 March 1938 the long-awaited day had arrived. The four professors were ordained in the church building of the Dutch Reformed congregation of Pretoria East. Six students enrolled at the new Faculty of Theology of the Dutch Reformed Church in Transvaal. They were J.P. Grobler, J.M. Louw, R.B. Murray, J.P. Theron, A.A. van Wyk and L.L.J. Visser (Van der Watt 1987:178).

The water that sprang from this new fountain slowly but surely found its way through the arid earth of the Transvaal. The huge influence of the faculty on society in the Transvaal was later confirmed by one of the faculty's first students, Rev. A.A. van Wyk:

*Dit was in 1938 – die Voortrekker-eeufeesjaar – toe die Teologiese Fakulteit van ons kerk tot stand gekom het dat ons tesame met die nuwe professore ook ons nuwe taak begin het. Ons moes saam ons weg voel-voel soek. In die geloof en met inspanning het hulle voorwaarts gegaan en ons het gevolg. Hulle diepe godsbewustheid en ernstige toewyding het ons altyd laat rus in die versekering: Hulle is Godgegee... Voorwaar, as ek moes teruggeplaas word na 1935 en ek kon weer oorkies, dan sou my keuse weer sonder huiwering op die Teologiese Fakulteit van Pretoria val.*

(Van Wyk 1946:26)

## A STREAM OF BLESSING

### The stream grows Students

Water from the fountain quickly became a stream blessing the university, the Church and society. Within eight years E.P. Groenewald, one of the first professors, wrote: 'Studentetalle groei vinnig...' and also 'ledere jaar kom daar 'n paar [studente] by. In 1945 was daar 27 studente en in 1946 30' (Groenewald 1946:11). The year 1970 was a special milestone when, for the first time, more than a hundred students enrolled (Hofmeyr 1971:35).

Student numbers continued to rise. In 1978 the Curatorium reported to the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church that 327 students enrolled for Theology and 209 for the admission course. A further 102 students were busy with doctoral studies (Agenda 1978:703). The stream of blessing that sprang from the fountain indeed became stronger and stronger.

### Professors

However, not only the increase in student numbers contributed to the growing force of the stream. The lecturers also played a major part in the influence of the faculty on the university.

*Die invloed van die fakulteit aan die universiteit hang natuurlik groteliks af van die optrede van die professore. In die omgang met hulle kollegas uit ander fakulteite sowel as op verskillende vergaderings waar hulle saam met die ander sitting het word steeds op hulle gelet. In tye van stryd en krisis het hulle die geleentheid om die vrede na te streef en geregtigheid te laat seëvier. Dit was 'n voorreg wat hulle met dankbaarheid gebruik het.*

(Groenewald 1946:12)

Growing student numbers meant an increasing workload on the four professors who were appointed. The appointment of more professors was important to ensure the steady growth of the faculty. With the retirement of G.M. Pellissier in 1946, the workload was partially eased when the church decided to use him as professor in Church Subjects. In the same year A.B. du Preez was appointed professor in Dogmatics (Hofmeyr 1971:32). This gave lecturers the opportunity to specialise in their different fields of study (Groenewald 1962:29).

Specialisation in fields of expertise soon became an important argument for further appointments and the extension of the staff of the faculty. This led to the establishment of a fifth department, namely the Department of Religious and Missionary Sciences, in 1948. After Pellissier had retired in 1952, H.D.A. du Toit was appointed professor in the new department in 1953. He was also responsible for Practical Theology (Hofmeyr 1971:32).

Keet retired in 1953 and was succeeded in 1954 by B.J. Marais. In order to make room for further specialisation Missionary Sciences and Practical Theology was divided into two separate departments. In 1967 C.W.H. Boshoff was appointed professor in the Department of Missionary Sciences (Van der Watt 1988:17).

In 1966 J.H. Kritzinger was succeeded by A.H. van Zyl and in 1971 A.B. du Toit and J.A. Heyns were appointed. J.J. de Klerk followed in 1973 and P.B. van der Watt in 1975 after the retirement of B.J. Marais (Van der Watt 1988:17).

The enormous growth in student numbers in the early seventies led to a further six appointments in 1975. *'Dit gee 'n aanduiding van die reuse gestalte wat die fakulteit aangeneem het'* (Agenda 1978:702). Lecturers who were appointed were A.C. Barnard, F.J. Botha, C.F.A. Borchardt, D. Crafford, W.S. Prinsloo, P.C. Potgieter, J.A. du Randt, M.H.O. Kloppers and H.J.C. Pieterse. This meant that the Faculty of Theology had six departments with the following staff members:

Old Testament: Profs A.H. van Zyl, W.S. Prinsloo and Rev M.H.O. Kloppers  
 New Testament: Profs A.B. du Toit, F.J. Botha and Dr J.A. du Randt  
 Dogmatics: Profs J.A. Heyns and P.C. Potgieter  
 Church History: Profs P.B. van der Watt and C.F.A. Borchardt  
 Missionary Sciences: Profs C.W.H. Boshoff and D. Crafford  
 Practical Theology: Profs J.J. de Klerk, A.C. Barnard and Rev. H.J.C. Pieterse (Agenda 1978:703)

### A building

The growth of the faculty presented new challenges. In 1946 Prof. J.H. Kritzinger wrote that the faculty, after eight years of growth, had reached the stage where certain needs had become acute and added that the church had to take note of new challenges and new requirements (Kritzinger 1946:13). He emphasised that space was a major problem. Classrooms were too small and there was a lack of office space. A lack of text books and theological books were also high on the list of priorities. There was also an urgent need for bursaries for students.

*'n Groot behoefte aan beurse vir voornemende studente was 'n verdere behoefte. As iemand sy hele studie op geleende geld moet aflê, dan gaan hy na sewe jaar van opleiding aan die Universiteit die bediening in met 'n skuld las waaronder hy as predikant met sy huisgesin die res van hulle lewe sal swaarkry Dit val nie swaar om dit te besef wanneer ons onthou dat in ons duur tyd 'n student ongeveer 120 pond per jaar nodig het nie.*

(Kritzinger 1946:14)

The lack of lecture rooms and office space, however, was a major source of frustration. In the agreement between the church and the university, the university undertook to accommodate the Theological Faculty. At first a room was provided in the old Club Hall of the university. Two washrooms in the Old Arts building were converted into lecture rooms after which the Inter hall was used (Hofmeyer 1971:36).

Growing student numbers forced the synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Transvaal to collect money for a new building for the faculty. The Theological Faculty fund quickly reached the 30 000 pound mark under the leadership of Rev. P.J. Swart. Five thousand pounds were given to the university for the construction of a new building for Theology. A memorial tablet was unveiled during the synod meeting of 1951 at the entrance of the New Arts building where the Faculty of Theology found its new accommodation on the university campus. The building was initially shared with the Faculty of Education. Since 31 August 1983 the building was officially named the Theology building due to the direct interest of the rector of the university, Prof D.M. Joubert (Van der Watt 1988:16).

### Beneficial influence

One of the major reasons for establishing a theological faculty at the University of Pretoria was the beneficial influence that the faculty could have on the university as a whole. In a report to the synod it was referred to as being done *'ter wille van die Universiteit'* (Verslag 1937:5). In its report to the Transvaal Synod of 1937, the Commission states the following:

*Die Universiteit van Pretoria is reeds by uitnemendheid die Afrikaaner- Universiteit van die Noorde. Daarheen stroom die Afrikaanse studente van Transvaal en die OVS in hulle honderde. Daar word die meeste van ons Afrikaanse onderwysers opgelei. Daar word ook die welvaartwerkers opgelei wat in die naaste toekoms seker 'n belangrike rol gaan speel in verband met die opheffing van ons veragterdes. Te midde van dit alles is die invloed wat ons tans uitoefen betreklik gering.*

(Verslag 1937:5)

The Commission also clearly stated that the Theological Faculty could have a beneficial influence not only on the university but also on the Afrikaner people as a whole.

This clarifies the purpose of the new faculty since its inception. Since the beginning, the Dutch Reformed Church wanted to influence not only the university but also society. This is confirmed in the congratulatory message of the rector, Prof. D.M. Joubert, at the faculty's jubilee, in which he paid tribute to students and lecturers who had a major influence not only on the university but on the country as a whole (Van der Watt 1988:9).

The important role played by the Theological Faculty of the Dutch Reformed Church is also confirmed by a report to the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1998. The report mentions a meeting that took place where the rectors of the Universities of Stellenbosch, Pretoria and Bloemfontein were present. During the meeting the rectors declared that: *'teologiese opleiding as so belangrik beskou word, dat daarmee voortgegaan sou word al onttrek die kerk. Hulle het ondermeer verklaar dat die universiteite baie sou inboet sonder teologiese opleiding'* (Agenda 1998:95).

Church, university and society benefited from the influence of the Faculty of Theology like an ecosystem benefits from a river. The river that sprang from the fountain flowed through decades of history to the benefit of the whole of South Africa. It is almost impossible to give a detailed description of the impact of this river; therefore a few important examples to underline this statement will be discussed.

### Bible translation: Contribution by professors

It is not without reason that Prof. D.M. Joubert made special mention of the contribution made by professors of the Faculty of Theology towards the translation of the Bible in Afrikaans (Van der Watt 1988:6). The introduction of a new translation of the Bible in Afrikaans in 1983 was a milestone not only in the history of the Afrikaans churches but also in the history of the whole Afrikaner community. Lecturers from the Faculty of Theology in Pretoria played a major role in this monumental work. Prof. A.H. van Zyl, lecturer in Old Testament, was appointed secretary of the Translation Commission in 1958. After the retirement of B.B. Keet in 1966, E.P. Groenewald, professor in New Testament, was appointed chairman. F.J. Botha, A.B. du Toit and W.S. Prinsloo also took part in the translation. The Curatorium of the faculty released Van Zyl in 1970 in order to spend more of his time translating. He was appointed full-time in 1983 to proofread all the texts of the Old Testament. Thus Borchardt is correct in saying that the faculty played a major part in the translation of the Bible (Borchardt 1988:49).

### P.B. van der Watt: Theologian, professor, student dean

*'Om 'n betekenisvolle invloed op die Universiteit tot nut van ons volk uit te oefen'* was a goal mentioned in the report to the Transvaal Synod of 1937 (Verslag 1937:5). This dream would become a reality in 1989 with the appointment of P.B. van der Watt as student dean

at the University of Pretoria (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1989). Van der Watt was appointed professor and head of the Department of Church History and Polity in 1975. After the retirement of B.J. Marais, Van der Watt excelled as academic and church leader. As author of 471 scientific and contemporary articles and 38 books, his impact on the university, the church and society was enormous. In recognition of his work, he was awarded the Totius Prize for Theology in 1988. He also served as dean of the Faculty of Theology from 1987.

As church leader he served on numerous commissions before being elected Assessor of the Synod of Northern Transvaal in 1983. In 1987 he was elected moderator of the same synod, where he played a major role.

His concern with student affairs and student life on campus as well as his influence as academic and church leader did not go unnoticed. In 1989 he was appointed student dean of the University of Pretoria. In his acceptance of the appointment Van der Watt underlined that it was part of a larger calling. In a letter to Rev. G.J.C. Venter, secretary of the Curatorium, he wrote: *'Die nuwe werksaamheid sien ek as 'n voortsetting van roeping in Sy koninkryk – die terrein word slegs omvangryker'* (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1989:2). He also made mention of the 'spiritual nature' of his new post and said that it would be a great advantage to the Dutch Reformed Church. At that stage Van der Watt was 'pastor' to more than 20 000 students, most of whom were members of the Dutch Reformed Church. He also stated that it was his intention to preach the gospel whenever an opportunity arose (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1989:2).

Unfortunately the Dutch Reformed Church missed a golden opportunity with Van der Watt's appointment. This became evident from the red tape that followed his appointment. While the Commission for Church Polity of the Synod of Northern Transvaal gave him the go ahead to retire with full status (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1989:2), the Executive Committee of the Commission for Church Polity of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church thought otherwise. They stated:

*'Die ARK Dagbestuur is van oordeel dat u tot 'n ander lewensstaat oorgaan waar daar geen kerklike roeping aan verbonde is nie' and further: 'In die lig van die voorafgaande moet die ARK Dagbestuur met spyt aan u berig dat u nie u predikantstatus kan behou nie'* (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1989).

This short-sighted decision would not stop Van der Watt from doing his work as student dean with great excellence. What started in 1937 as an ideal became a reality through the work and life of Van der Watt.

### P.J.G. Meiring: Instrument of reconciliation

The beneficial influence of the lecturers of the Faculty of Theology was not limited to the university and the church. It went much deeper. The stream that arose from the fountain touched the heart of South African society through the work of P.J.G. Meiring, when he was appointed as commissar of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. Meiring was professor in the University of Pretoria's Department of Science of Religions and Missiology at the time.

The Truth and Reconciliation Committee was appointed shortly after the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994 (Meiring 1999:10). One of the important tasks of the commission was to see that the South African government would give recognition to the victims of human rights violations (Du Toit 2002:119). Meiring received the invitation to be part of the Commission in 1996. After the university complied with the request, he was seconded to the Commission for a period of 24 months. The Curatorium of the Faculty of Theology also gave the go ahead because of the 'importance of the matter' (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1996:1). The participation of Meiring in this important, historical event meant that not only the faculty, but also the university and the Dutch

Reformed Church were part of the process of reconciliation in South Africa.

It was, however, especially the Dutch Reformed Church that benefited from Meiring's appointment. After months of indecision it was Meiring's direct intervention that saw the Dutch Reformed Church take her place at a special meeting of the Commission in November 1997. Only after repeated letters to the secretary of the Executive Committee of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church did they decide to make a submission during a special hearing for churches and other religious organisations that took place from 17 to 19 November 1997 in East London. In one of his letters he wrote:

*'My ernstige advies is dat ons kerk die historiese geleentheid nie moet laat verbygaan nie'*.

(Du Toit ea 2002:123)

As a result of his persistence, the moderator of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church at the time, Rev. Freek Swanepoel, was present at the hearing on 19 November 1997. If not for Meiring, the Dutch Reformed Church would have allowed this opportunity to witness to slip by.

Although Meiring was the object of much criticism due to his participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, his presence was part of the stream of blessing that flowed forth from the fountain since 1938. It brought with it water of healing to a South African society ravaged by apartheid.

### J.A. Heyns: The highest price

Water from a fountain not only nourishes; it also cleanses and purifies. Sometimes this comes with a price. J.A. Heyns paid the highest price on 5 November 1994 when he was assassinated in his home while playing cards with his grandchildren (Van der Merwe 1996:325). The murder has not been solved yet and the motive is still unknown.

Heyns was a brilliant academic, adored lecturer and writer par excellence. He received the Andrew Murray prize three times: in 1981 for *Dogmatiek*, in 1985 for *Teologiese Etiek* and in 1989 for *Teologiese Etiek 2/1*. He also made a huge impact on the Dutch Reformed Church. He was the moderator of the historical General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1986 where the policy document 'Church and Society' was accepted. His leadership in church meetings was outstanding and he served the church with his talents until his untimely death in 1994 (Van der Merwe 1996:325).

That Heyns's influence went much further than university and church was confirmed by the recognition he received from former State President, P.W. Botha, in 1988, when Heyns was awarded the Decoration for Outstanding Service (Gold). It was probably this influence in society that led to his death. Heyns was known for making statements that were not accepted in all circles. Lategan wrote:

*Johan Heyns het soms uitsprake gemaak en standpunte ingeneem wat nie vir almal aanvaarbaar was nie. Die manier waarop hy gesterf het, sê iets van sy statuur: 'n profeet is nie altyd welkom nie.*

(Lategan 1996:326)

W.D. Jonker wrote, in a tribute to Heyns:

*Sou dit kon wees dat hy miskien die hoogste prys betaal het, juis vanweë sy ywer vir die saak van vrede en versoening in ons land? Dit weet ons nie. Maar, as dit sou wees, dan het hy gesterf in die goeie tradisie van die getuie, die martelaar, wie se getuienis deur niks beter beseël kan word nie, as deur sy eie bloed.*

(Jonker 1996:327)

The cleansing influence that Johan Heyns had on society could not be stopped by a bullet. The manner in which he died simply made the impact of the river even stronger.

## IMER

It was not only students and lecturers that influenced church, university and society. The research done by researchers in the field of Missiology also played an enormous part in changing South African society. The Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research (IMER) played a major part in this area.

The institute originated in 1979 as a joint enterprise of the Department of Religious Studies and Missiology of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria. The Dutch Reformed Church identified a need for research in the field of Missiology after the meeting of the General Synod in 1978. The basic mission of IMER was to identify and initiate research projects aimed at the more relevant involvement of the church in the wider community of South Africa (Agenda 1994:237). During that time, Dr J.M. Cronje, the secretary of the Commission for Missions of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, acted as first director of the institute (Kotze 1988:76). IMER went from strength to strength after the General Synod of 1982, when the university decided to subsidise IMER. This led to the appointment of a permanent senior researcher. On 1 January 1986 Dr J.J. Kritzinger was appointed as the first permanent researcher of IMER (Kotze 1988:77).

IMER was responsible for several groundbreaking publications. *Aan God die Dank* was a comprehensive work in two parts about the history of missions in the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1982 IMER started to bring research possibilities to the attention of ministers and congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church. IMER not only made a huge contribution to the church but also to South African society

In 1986 IMER evolved further when research functions were extended to incorporate Ecumenics (Kotze 1988:78). This opened up the world of Ecumenics to new research opportunities and brought added value to the university, the church and society. This is confirmed by the fact that the university did not hesitate to subsidise IMER in the midst of a rationalisation process during the late eighties. At the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1990 it was reported that the university was still prepared to carry 70% of Kritzinger's post (Agenda 1990:318).

The work done by IMER was enormous. By 1994 15000 documents were unlocked. Research on the ecumenical vocation of the church led to a large and unique publication which forms a basis text for developing and presenting a course in Ecumenics. IMER was also instrumental in the development of a new methodology which challenged students and ministers to fight poverty by way of research and new projects (Handelinge 1998:326). The influence of the faculty was even wider thanks to the work of IMER. Clean water flowing from the fountain was quenching the thirst of thousands of poor and homeless people.

## CCTT

While IMER was being established, the Centre for Continued Theological Training (CCTT) came into being. One of the main aims of the CCTT was to provide continuous theological training to ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church. The necessity for further training became evident when a large number of ministers enrolled for doctoral studies but failed to complete their studies (Kotze 1988:79). The General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church decided to investigate the situation by means of a study committee. The committee started its work in 1982 with the main aim to investigate the viability of a centre for continuous learning in the faculty (Kotze 1988:79).

After the different synods in the Transvaal accepted the proposals of the committee, the Board of the Centre for Continued Theological Training convened for the first time on 30 January 1984. Malan Nel was appointed part-time director. He was succeeded by W. Vosloo in 1989.

The main goal of the CCTT was to enrich and reinforce the ministry of ministers and other office bearers of the Dutch Reformed Church by means of continued professional training, as well as to equip the members for their service and testimony in the church and in society (Agenda 1990:412). The different courses that were developed ensured that the faculty also influenced ordinary people's lives.

## IN THE RAPIDS

A stream that springs from a fountain gradually flows through a dry landscape to the benefit of all plants and animals. It usually changes the landscape. Sometimes the landscape 'fights back' and forces the stream over rocks and through gorges. This brings waves, whitewater and thunder to the river as it makes its way through rapids before it reaches the peace and tranquillity of a lagoon. The Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria went through its own rapids as it passed through the decades of time. There were times of unrest and unease but those prepared the faculty for the time to come, the new millennium, when the confluence with other streams would be inevitable.

## Professors in the crossfire

### B.J. Marais

One of the first professors of the faculty that found himself in the crossfire of criticism was B.J. Marais. Marais was appointed professor in Church History and Polity in 1954. After his address at the second meeting of the World Council of Churches in Evanston in 1954, the Presbytery of Langlaagte enquired about his political point of view (Borchardt 1988:49). In November 1954 the Curatorium responded that he was in Evanston in his private capacity and not as an official representative of the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1960 he was co-writer of the book *Vertraagde aksie: 'n Ekumeniese getuienis uit die Afrikaanse kerk*. The content of the publication was met with dismay during the Transvaal Synod of 1961. Members of the synod demanded that the book must be withdrawn from bookshops and that action be taken against the writers of the book. The main reason for this reaction was that the book contradicted the policy of church and state (Borchardt 1988:49).

Although Marais's point of view was controversial at the time, his contribution to theology was recognised by the State President, Nelson Mandela, during the meeting of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in Pretoria in 1994 (Agenda 1994:536). Mandela recognised that Marais was prepared to take a stand against the National Party policy of apartheid, which was motivated from scripture by the Dutch Reformed Church. To this day there are differences when evaluating Marais's contribution. At the time, however, the reaction to Marais's point of view brought turmoil to the faculty.

### The Reformed Day witness

Eight lecturers from the Faculties of Theology of Stellenbosch and Pretoria published a witness in *Die Kerkbode* on 5 November 1980. This witness soon became known as the Reformed Day witness. C.F.A. Borchardt, A.B. du Toit and J.A. Heyns were the lecturers from the faculty in Pretoria that signed the witness.

In the witness, the eight theologians expressed their concern about the inability of the Dutch Reformed Church to perform her prophetic calling in South Africa especially regarding the injustice in society (*Die Kerkbode* 5 June 1980:605). The witness pleaded with officials and members of the Dutch Reformed Church to eradicate loveless behaviour and racism from society. They also called on the church to work with more vigour towards church unity (Van der Merwe 1990:223).

The witness led to turmoil within the church. The Curatorium met on 19 and 20 November 1980. In a strongly worded letter to all the staff of the Faculty of Theology, the Curatorium requested lecturers at the faculty not to make in an organised manner any

declarations that could lead to mistrust in the church. They also asked why the witness was published on Reformed Day, if nothing sinister was meant by it.

This was not the end of the matter. Early in 1981 all the ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Transvaal were summoned to a secret meeting at Hartebeespoort Dam, where the church leadership again reprimanded the professors. However, it ended in triumph for the supporters of the witness when Heyns received a standing ovation by the more than 500 ministers of the church that were present (Van der Merwe 1990:261). The Reformed Day witness brought turmoil to the faculty but that could not silence the prophetic voice reprimanding church and society. It was unmistakably part of the stream of blessing that flowed from the fountain that originated in 1938.

### 'False teachings'

The year 1989 brought new tumult when a former student of the Faculty of Theology, Rev. C.F. Heiberg, sent a 'memorandum about false teachings' to the Executive Commission of the Synod of the Western Transvaal. In the memorandum Heiberg stated that he and fellow students had for some time been worried about certain aspects of the teaching at the faculty (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1989:3). The scriptural view of J.H. le Roux was questioned; A.B. du Toit, J.G. van der Watt and P.P.A. Kotze were accused of not making certain corrections after a lecture of Dr Van Tilburg from the Netherlands; J.A. Heyns was accused of making friendly overtures towards 'Rome'; and P.J.G. Meiring was condemned after he supposedly repeatedly said that '*ons die mooi in die Moslems en Hindoes se godsdien moet raaksien*' (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1989:4). The 'memorandum' was signed by twelve students and ministers. The memorandum was handed to the Curatorium of the Faculty of Theology with the request to look into the matter. Although meetings between the students and the professors were organised, Heiberg went ahead with his insinuations against the lecturers. He also accused the faculty of so-called liberalism, even after the charges against the professors were unconditionally dropped (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1990:3). This led to reaction from the Church Council of the Dutch Reformed congregation Rant en Dal, where Heiberg was a minister. They wrote a letter to the Presbytery of Krugersdorp asking that Heiberg be requested '*om hom te weerhou van verdere verdagmaking*' (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1990:3).

In 1991 the secretary of the Curatorium wrote to the secretary of the Presbytery of Krugersdorp that Heiberg did not react to the invitation of the dean of the Faculty of Theology at the time, W.S. Prinsloo, to identify specific liberal issues within the faculty. He added: '*Die Dagbestuur het na indringende gesprekke homself vergewis van die leersuiwerheid van die dosente*' (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1991:2).

The professors and the faculty came through this rapid with flying colours. It gave new momentum to serving church and society on an even higher level.

### Political storms

The nineties in South Africa were times of political unrest and conflict. The professors of the Faculty of Theology could not escape the troubled times. On 2 February 1990 the State President, F.W. de Klerk, announced the unbanning of the African National Congress during the opening of parliament. He also announced that Nelson Mandela, leader of the ANC, would be freed after 27 years in prison. (Du Toit 2002:111). During the negotiations that followed it was decided that a referendum would be held in May 1992 to decide if the government would proceed with the process of negotiation.

In the preamble to the referendum, three professors, namely A.B. du Toit, S.J. Joubert and J.J. Kritzinger, made a statement declaring that the decisions taken by the General Synod in 1990 meant that members of the church had no other choice than to vote 'yes' in the upcoming referendum. That meant voting for political change and the continuation of the process of negotiation. They

immediately got a reaction from the more conservative members of the church. Rev. P.S. Strumpfer expressed the feelings of the more conservative members in a strongly worded letter to the Executive of the Curatorium. He quoted the Executive Commission of the General Synod in saying:

*Dit lê nie op die weg van die kerk of enige ampsdraers of vergaderings om lidmate te adviseer om 'ja' of 'nee' in die komende referendum te stem nie, aangesien die vraag waarop kiesers 'n antwoord moet gee, 'n duidelike partypolitieke keuse behels en die kerk nie geroepe is om hom daarvoor uit te spreek nie.*

(Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1994)

This led to a brotherly talk among the Executive of the Curatorium, which brought calm to the situation.

These events confirmed that the Faculty of Theology indeed had an influence on church and society and did not function apart from society. The lecturers did not live in ivory towers but tried their utmost to keep up with the challenges of church and society. They strived to interpret the problems of the day and to give guidance to students, church members and South African society as a whole. That this guidance was not always welcomed by everybody in church and society confirms the critical role played by the lecturers of the faculty.

### Financial storm clouds

The seventies brought growing student numbers which meant more professors and exceptional growth to the faculty. The stream became a river that flowed deep and wide through the society of South Africa. This would not always be the case. Changing circumstances put the faculty through new rapids. Because of the suspension of national service the market was flooded with prospective ministers. This was one of the possible causes that led to a slump in student numbers. By October 1990 there was already a surplus of 110 proponents. The number increased to 180 in 1998 (Handelinge 1998:97).

Student numbers tell the story: in 1986 there were 373 students, in 1990 329, in 1994 189, in 1996 164 and in 1997 only 129 students (Agenda 1997:121). Fewer students would also mean fewer lecturers. In 1995 the four synods of the Transvaal separately decided the following:

1. *Nuwe poste kan alleen geskep word indien al vier die Sinodes van Transvaal dit goedkeur.*
2. *Voordat die Kuratorium 'n bestaande pos wat vakant is, vul, moet die Dagbestuur van die Kuratorium met die Gesamentlike Begrotingskommissie samesprekings voer en adviese van hulle kry.*
3. *Die Kuratoria hanteer die vulling van die vakature verder met verantwoording aan die Sinodes.*

(Handelinge 1995:477)

This decision led to vacancies in Church History and Polity, Biblical Studies, Missiology and Practical Theology not being filled (Agenda 1997:121). On 26 September 1996, the Executive Committee of the Curatorium decided to fill only the vacancy in New Testament (Dagbestuur Kuratorium 1996:4).

This situation prepared the faculty for a new phase that was dawning in 2000. Rivers would come together to form an even larger river with more influence on university, church and society.

### A NEW PHASE

*Just a little more  
And we shall see the  
Almond trees in blossom  
The marbles shining in the sun  
The sea, the curling waves.  
Just a little more  
Let us rise just a little higher*

(Seferis 1995:23)

The year 2000 was in a way a new beginning for the Faculty of Theology. It saw the establishment of a multi-church faculty when two partners, namely the Dutch Reformed Church and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika, made an agreement with the University of Pretoria. In 2001 a third denomination joined the partnership when the Presbyterian Uniting Church became part of the agreement. The ecumenical foundation for a new Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria was laid. This confluence of different streams meant that the river that originated in 1938 was now stronger and deeper than before. The university, different churches and society would benefit enormously from this new river of life that flowed through the landscape of South Africa.

### International agreements

One of the outstanding achievements of this new faculty soon came to light when agreements with well-known international partners delivered dividends. Students from the Protestant Faculty in Vienna attended courses at the faculty in Pretoria and students from Pretoria attended courses in Vienna. In addition to that, an agreement between the University of Pretoria and the Maximilian Faculty in Munich, Germany, was signed in 2006. This agreement holds great potential for the future of both faculties.

### Structure of the faculty

One of the major challenges for the new faculty was establishing a new structure within the faculty. On 1 January 2000, C.J.A. Vos was appointed the first dean of the joint Faculty of Theology, while A.P.B. Breytenbach was appointed deputy dean. He was succeeded by J. Buitendag after he retired in March 2004. Vos still serves as dean of the faculty after he was appointed for a second term in 2005.

The faculty consists of six academic departments with the following persons as heads of department:

- Dogmatics and Christian Ethics: C.J. Wethmar
- Science of Religion and Missiology: P.J. van der Merwe
- Church History and Polity: J.W. Hofmeyr
- New Testament Studies: J.G. van der Watt
- Old Testament Studies: P.M. Venter
- Practical Theology: J.C. Müller

The rest of the staff consists of:

#### Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics

- D.E. de Villiers, appointed in January 1994, also director of the Centre for Public Theology
- D.P. Veldsman, appointed in August 2007

#### Department of Science of Religion and Missiology

- J.J. Kritzing, appointed in 1991, retired at the end of 2002
- A.S. van Niekerk, appointed in January 1997
- P.J.G. Meiring retired in January 2007 and was succeeded by C.P.J. Niemandt in July 2007

#### Department of Church History and Polity

- G.A. Duncan, appointed in August 2006
- J.W. Hofmeyr retired in July 2007 and was succeeded in January 2008 by J.M. van der Merwe

#### Department of New Testament Studies

- G.J. Steyn, appointed in February 2003
- E. van Eck, appointed in July 2006
- S.J. Joubert, appointed associate professor in July 1990, head of the department of Biblical Studies January 1994-1996, Department of New Testament 1997 to August 2002
- G.M.M. Pels, appointed in 1972, retired in 2001
- A.G. van Aarde, appointed part-time in January 1979 in the Department of Greek, full-time in Theology since August 1980, retired in September 2005

#### Department of Old Testament Studies

- A. Groenewald, appointed in October 2005

#### Department of Practical Theology

- Y. Dreyer, appointed in January 2000
- M.S. Masango, appointed in January 2001

Several academic programmes play an important role in the faculty. D.J. Human acts as programme leader for Biblical and Religious Studies and J.H. le Roux for Telematic Teaching while P.G.J. Meiring coordinates the enrichment programmes.

Centres and institutes also function as an integral part of the faculty. M. Nel was appointed director of the Centre for Contextual Ministry in January 2002.

### Strategy of the faculty

#### Vision

In order to be a faculty that makes a difference in all spheres of life, the vision of the faculty was formulated as follows: 'Quality theology and students for the future'. With this vision the faculty wants to align itself with the university's vision of 'shaping the future'. Particular emphasis is placed on academic excellence and critical theological thinking. This is the unique place that the faculty finds for itself in the South African theological landscape. The Faculty of Theology must be the first choice of talented and critical students (Faculty of Theology 2008:6).

#### Strategic goals

In order to achieve this vision, the following strategic goals have been identified (Faculty of Theology 2008:7):

- to offer quality tuition at both pre- and postgraduate levels which meets national and international standards;
- to establish a research culture which is recognised nationally and internationally and in which students and lecturers reach their full potential;
- to execute its social responsibility towards its students, clerical partners and the broader South African society; and
- to be recognised as the leading theological faculty in South Africa.

#### Core business

The core business of the faculty is aligned with the core business of the University of Pretoria and consists of several fountains that feed the river with fresh, life-sustaining water.

#### Research

Research is one of the important fountains that provide clear water to the river which the faculty became. Two theological journals are being published within the faculty, namely *HTS Theological/Theologies Studies* and *Verbum et Ecclesia*. Both these journals are accredited by the South African Department of Education and are included in their list of subsidised academic journals. Both serve academy, theology and church with distinction.

The research programme of the faculty is structured and organised better. Research proposals are thoroughly selected before being accepted. In order to advance the quality of research, a course in methodology is presented annually.

The result of high-quality theological research becomes evident not only in the publication of articles in accredited journals, but especially in international publications. Numerous books were published by sought-after international publishers such as T&T Clark (New York and London), Lit-Verlag (Münster) and Brill Uitgewers (Leiden). This increases the influence of the faculty in the international arena.

#### Education and education innovation

The second important fountain is education and education innovation.

### a) Education strategy

One of the factors that played a major role in influencing the teaching strategy of the faculty was the announcement of a new degree structure. This is an indication of the fact that the education strategy of the faculty takes the new challenges emerging from church and society into account. Postgraduate education is an important part of the education strategy. With high numbers of enrolment, theology and church are served with distinction by the postgraduate programmes. The denominational partners of the faculty have also identified life-long continued learning for its ministers as being very important. Therefore the establishment of programmes for continued learning is a high priority in the faculty.

### b) Telematic education

The years 2000 to 2008 also saw the establishment of telematic education as the faculty discovered the potential of world-wide presence through electronic media. Research is being done to extend the role of telematic teaching even further. The website [www.teo.co.za](http://www.teo.co.za) is under the management of J.H. le Roux, G. de Villiers and A. Groenewald. It is an exciting project of the faculty; on the one hand it is the public arm of the faculty and on the other hand it is a way of introducing the public to the work of the faculty.

### Community engagement

The third important fountain is community engagement, on which a high premium is placed in the faculty. Three centres have been established with community engagement as the main objective, namely the Centre for Public Theology, the Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research (IMER) and the Nova Institute. The Functional Household Programme presented by IMER and the Nova Institute brings together researchers from different disciplines in a multi-disciplinary team to conduct research on practical solutions for households. This includes research in the fields of medicine, agriculture, education and law, and confirms the faculty's commitment to community engagement.

### The School for Creative Writing

A fourth important fountain is the School for Creative Writing in which all the faculties take part. Brainchild of C.J.A. Vos, dean of the Faculty of Theology, the school makes an important contribution to innovation and creativity and delivers a service to all the faculties of the university. During the winter school ministers learn to write more fluently under the supervision of writers and poets. This improves their competence in ministry (Faculty of Theology 2008:6–28).

## CONCLUSION

*The Faculty of Theology associates itself with everybody celebrating the centenary of the University of Pretoria. The Faculty has since its establishment served theology, university, church and society with distinction. My wish is that this will always be the case.*

(Vos 2008:1)

This wish of C.J.A. Vos is in line with what the rector at that time, Prof. D.J. Joubert, said in 1988. It also goes back to the ideals of everybody who dreamt of and worked for the establishment of a faculty of theology in the north of the country. The fountain that originated in 1938 had indeed become a stream and eventually a river that grew with the years. As it flowed through the decades of history it was to the benefit of university, church and society. There were several rapids in the river which brought turmoil. All this, however, prepared the faculty for a new phase in its history which started in 2000. Since then, the multi-denominational faculty went from strength to strength. The best way to summarise these events is *Soli Deo Gloria ...* To God the honour!

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