FROM **HOPE** TO **ACTION** THROUGH **KNOWLEDGE**

The Renaissance of the
University of the Western Cape

2001 – 2014

Editors

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The advancement of scholarship in religion and theology in the O'Connell era at UWC

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Introduction

When Brian O'Connell became the Rector and Vice-Chancellor at the University of the Western Cape in 2001, the institution was still reeling from the rapid decline in student numbers after 1995, the trauma of the retrenchments in 1998, severe financial difficulties and the spectre of institutional mergers.

These challenges were perhaps epitomised by the study of religion and theology at UWC. The decline in student numbers in the Humanities affected in particular the subject 'Biblical Studies' that was offered in the 1990s. It was no longer a subject in secondary education, scholarships for teacher training were no longer available and public pronouncements by political leaders singled out this subject as an example of what is *not* needed to meet South Africa's challenges. First-year student numbers dropped from more than 600 in the early 1990s to fewer than 100 by 1998.

The staff establishment in the former Faculty of Religion and Theology, with its four departments, namely Biblical Studies and Languages, Christian Studies, Christianity and Society, and Religious Studies declined from 19 in 1995 to 15 in 1998. This was followed by the retrenchment of a further six members of staff in 1998, the cancellation of the agreement

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between UWC and the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa, the subsequent loss of some 60% of students registered for degrees in theology, the resignation of two senior scholars (Prof Russel Botman and Dirkie Smit) in 1999 to take up positions at Stellenbosch University, and the retirement of another senior scholar, Prof Denise Ackermann, at the end of 2000. In addition, Prof Daan Cloete acted as Rector for periods, while Mr Leolyn Jackson took up a position in the UWC administration.

In 2000 the Department of Religion and Theology was established in the Faculty of Arts. By 2001 it had five remaining staff members covering the fields of religion, ethics and theological studies – which had six separate departments until 1994, together with departments of Semitic Languages and Hellenistic Greek. This was a department threatened with closure, fragile and emotionally drained.

By the time Prof O'Connell retired in 2014 the department was thriving – as was the case with the University itself. How was such a turnaround possible? It would be inappropriate to attribute this to the direct influence of the Rector – who opened quite a few departmental conferences and offered occasional words of encouragement, but was not overtly involved in the affairs of the department or in the study of religion and theology. His own deep sense of Catholic spirituality served as a source of inspiration for many staff members across all faculties, but the staff members in the Department of Religion and Theology came from a Protestant and not the Roman Catholic tradition. Yet, in his typical leadership style, Prof O'Connell surrounded himself with intellectual leaders and created a climate within which others could flourish, while attending to the positioning of the University within a national and international context. Without such institutional space and support, the study of religion and theology would not have been able to flourish as it evidently did.

In the rest of this contribution I will tell the story of what the Department of Religion and Theology did right to allow the fields of religion, ethics and theology to flourish up to 2014, when Prof O'Connell retired. By that time the Department still had only six members of the academic staff, namely Profs Wollie Cloete, Ernst Conradie, Douglas Lawrie and Christo Lombard, Dr John Klaasen (who replaced Rev Jerome Cornelissen in 2008) and Dr Miranda Pillay. In this period Prof Hans Engdahl of Sweden was also appointed for three terms as Extraordinary Professor and made his presence felt in many ways.

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I will tell the story without much reference to Brian O'Connell, partly because even though he loves stories, with his typical modesty he would not want to be the main character in this story. I will identify a number of aspects that made a difference and will focus only on outstanding features and achievements.

Ethics as a major: The moral and religious foundations of society

In 1999 the then Faculty of Religion and Theology introduced a set of modules simply entitled 'Ethics'. This was offered as a service course available to students in other faculties across the university, at first only at the first-year level. Second- and third-year levels were added in 2000 and 2001, but third-year student numbers were so low that the department itself was not convinced of the course's viability. The course content was developed around the need for what Nelson Mandela called an "RDP of the soul". There was a need to strengthen the moral fabric of society, to build the moral and religious foundations of society. This would not be possible without a recognition of the role played by particular religious traditions and faith communities in moral formation. The idea was to help students who would become leaders in their communities and institutions to understand what such moral formation (if not moral regeneration) requires.

At first-year level this required attention not only to moral decision making and the values and duties that play contrasting roles in this regard (taking consequences into account or not). It also required attention to the role of moral visions, virtues, worldviews and the interpretation of religious and secular moral codes. At subsequent year levels modules were included that dealt with moral discourse on human rights and civil society, economic justice, the environment and gender and human sexuality, in addition to modules on religion, religious movements and religious diversity. Students could now take Ethics as a major subject for various bachelor degrees, while some also took individual modules (e.g. on the environment, or gender and human sexuality) as electives.

Theoretically, this approach constitutes a form of public virtue ethics, i.e. one framed as the formation of good citizens in civil society. This entails a quite unique blend of moral philosophy, ethical theory, applied ethics, religious studies and religious ethics – which also requires constant reflection and repositioning in the field. No one religious tradition is studied on its own, but the role of religion was recognised in all modules. It should

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also be noted that the subject Philosophy was not offered at UWC at that time, except for a few elective modules offered by Mr Kosie Abrahams. In its planning the Department of Religion and Theology groped intuitively for a sense of direction and gradually found its way – with spectacular results. First-year student numbers grew from around 60 in 1999 to close to 700 by 2014, while third-year numbers expanded from fewer than 10 in 2001 to between 150 and 200 by 2014. The subject Ethics continues to thrive, with a growing number of honours, master's and doctoral students, despite the lack of obvious job opportunities in the field.

The United Church of Zambia Theological College

In January 2000 Reverend Teddy Kalongo, the then Principal of the United Church of Zambia Theological College in Kitwe, Zambia (UCZTC), approached the Department of Religion and Theology to explore the possibilities of an accreditation of their Bachelor of Theology programme. By that time a three-year Bachelor of Theology had already been introduced at UWC to replace the four-year BTh, which included the subjects Hellenistic Greek and Biblical Hebrew. Since universities in South Africa are not accrediting agencies, a different model was adopted and an agreement was approved at both institutions that allowed UCZTC students to register at UWC, while receiving tuition at the Mindolo campus of the UCZTC. All aspects of the programme are moderated by UWC. The first cohort of students registered in 2001, which allowed stability in student numbers for the Bachelor of Theology at UWC ever since.

This agreement proved to be of mutual benefit, not least due to the deliberate focus on an indigenous African theology pursued at UCZTC. This fostered some cooperation in terms of conference attendance and research. The moderation process also required constant clarification on issues around teaching and learning that was also beneficial for the offering at UWC itself. Staff at UCZTC studied towards postgraduate degrees at UWC with Dr Kapemwa Kondolo and Dr Teddy Sakupapa, both graduating with a PhD. In the interim, the UCZTC became a university college and then an independent university (UCZU), with Dr Kondolo as its current Vice-Chancellor, while Dr Sakupapa has been appointed in the Department of Religion and Theology since 2016. This long-standing agreement remains in place as of 2019 and continues to be of mutual benefit.

A series of textbooks

The Department of Religion and Theology deliberately opted for programmes in theology and ethics that are ecumenically orientated and contextually relevant. It engaged in issues around a decolonisation of the curriculum long before this became fashionable. One crucial initiative in this regard was to produce textbooks to be used at undergraduate level that would be written by UWC authors, published from within the Western Cape context, with that as a geographical and historical frame of reference for students. Funds provided by Dutch donors in the 1990s are used to cover some underlying costs in order to provide students with books that are readily available through print on demand, relatively affordable (some are now open access) and contextually situated. The idea was never that such textbooks would be used for all modules, since students also need to be exposed to texts other than those written by their own lecturers. The textbooks produced thus far may be regarded as a remarkable achievement. In addition, some volumes were published that offered resources for further research by postgraduate students in the form of an orientation to the literature and an extended bibliography. The following titles are included in the series thus far:

- o *Mapping Systematic Theology in Africa: An Indexed Bibliography* (Conradie & Fredericks, 2004);
- o *Fishing for Jonah (anew): Various Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005);
- o *Speaking to Good Effect: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric* (Lawrie, 2005);
- o *Christian Identity: An Introduction* (Conradie, 2005b);
- o *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Research* (Conradie, 2006a);
- o *Morality as a Way of Life: A First Introduction to Ethical Theory* (Conradie et al., 2006); and
- o *Angling for Interpretation: A Guide to Understand the Bible Better* (Conradie, 2008a).

The Programme for Lay Theological Education

Under the leadership of Prof Daan Cloete, the Department has since 2006 introduced four credit-bearing continuous education courses offered after hours. This was born from the recognition that theological education is not aimed only at training towards the ordained ministry, but

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also towards the ministries of the laity both within local faith communities and through various vocations in society. These courses are offered in a two-year cycle and together constitute the Programme for Lay Theological Education, a unique form of community engagement with local churches. Through the mediation of Prof John Klaasen and Dr Miranda Pillay (both Anglicans), such training is recognised specifically by the Anglican Diocese of Saldanha.

Conferences hosted

Since 2000 the Department of Religion and Theology has hosted a series of public conferences that captured the social significance of the study of religion and theology. Prof Brian O'Connell was asked to open most of these. They attracted not only staff, students and other scholars, but also interest from local pastors in and around Cape Town. Many of these conferences received financial support from the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa, a long-standing partner in the Western Cape. The titles of these conferences are indicative of the kind of themes covered up to 2012:

- 2001   "The Church and HIV/AIDS": A one-day conference hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology (UWC) and the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa, UWC, 30 May 2001.
- 2002   "Rape: Rethinking Male Responsibility": A one-day conference hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology (UWC), the Women & Gender Studies Unit (UWC) and the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa, UWC, 30 May 2002 (Clowes & Conradie, 2003).
- 2002   "A Human Rights Culture in Sweden and South Africa": Colloquium under the auspices of an exchange programme between Hogskolan Dalarna, the Stellenbosch University and the University of the Western Cape, Stellenbosch, 4-5 November 2002 (Botman & Sporre, 2003).

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- 2003 "African Christian Theologies in Transformation: Respite et Prospice": Conference hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology and the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa, UWC, 4-6 June 2003 (Conradie 2004, serving as a tribute to Prof Daan Cloete, who organised the conference).
- 2004 "The Challenge of HIV/AIDS to Christian Theology": A one-day conference hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology at UWC, 30 July 2004.
- 2006 "Revisiting Intimacy: The Challenge of Homosexual relationships in Church and Society": A one-day conference hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology at UWC, 4 August 2006.
- 2006 "Defining fundamentalism and religious conservatism": A one-day conference hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology at UWC, 20 October 2006.
- 2006 "Building a Culture of Peace in Southern Africa": Conference co-organised by the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation, the Life and Peace Institute in Sweden and UWC, hosted at UWC, 22-23 November 2006.
- 2007 "What is Law without Morality?": A one-day conference hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology at UWC, 3 August 2007.
- 2008 "Leadership, Social Transformation and Healing", Two-day conference hosted at UWC, 5-6 June 2008 (Keim, 2010).
- 2009 "Emerging voices in Ethics and Theology": Colloquium hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology, UWC, 18 September 2009.
- 2011 "International debates on inter-religious learning in schools, with a special focus on faith-based schools": Conference hosted at UWC in partnership with Stellenbosch University, 31 August-2 September 2011.

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- 2012 “Christian Faith and the Earth: Respite et Prospice”, International conference hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology (UWC) at the Sustainability Institute, Lynedoch, 6-10 August 2012 (Conradie et al., 2014).
- 2012 “Where are the Men?”: Two day conferences hosted with partners such as the South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI), the Centre for Christian Spirituality (CCS) and Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) at UWC, 6-7 September 2012.

As indicated in the references above, several of these conferences led to publications, typically edited by members of the Department.

Four research frameworks

The Department of Religion and Theology, despite its small staff complement, made a firm commitment since 2000 to promote research amongst staff, extraordinary appointees and postgraduate students that is contextually relevant and ecumenically situated. From 2006 to 2016 its research activities were clustered together under four research frameworks. Each of these included more particular projects. Regular reports were posted on the departmental website, so that only some highlights need to be provided here with reference to monographs, festschrifts, edited volumes, theses and themed editions of journals.

A first research framework on “Moral Education towards a Human Rights Culture” explored ethical theory with specific reference to the moral dimensions of worldview theory, discourse on a human rights culture (Botman & Sporre, 2003), the role of religion in society to support moral cohesion (Leanya, 2014), the ‘global ethic’ (see Davids, 2014), and also a wide range of ethical themes such as moral and religious education in Southern African schools (Lita, 2014); violence against women and children (Clowes & Conradie, 2003; Festus, 2008; Herbert, 2008); HIV/AIDS (Ackermann, 2001), gender and homosexuality (Joaquim, 2012), globalisation (see contributions to Boesak & Hansen, 2010), the role of the formation of personhood in community development (Meyer, 2014, various contributions by Klaasen mostly after 2014), biotechnology, poverty, unemployment and inequality (Nkosi, 2016), and food security.

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A second research framework on 'Ecumenical Theology' included subsidiary projects on "Mapping Systematic Theology in Africa" (Agyarko, 2010, 2013; Conradie & Fredericks, 2004; Fisher, 2014; Ndalamba, 2011; Sakuba, 2013), African perspectives on 'Ecclesiology and ethics' (Engdahl & Okure, 2008; Coetzee, 2011; Sakupapa, 2017), reconciliation (Conradie, 2013; Kobe, 2015; Solomons, 2018), ecumenical theological education, the quest for denominational identity in South Africa (Abrahams, 2013; Anofuechi, 2015; Benjamin, 2014; Conradie & Klaasen, 2014; Potgieter, 2013) and ecumenical discourse on the 'God of Life' (Conradie, 2013a). Prof Conradie and Lombard also made major contributions to a reinterpretation of the Apostolicum produced for the Dutch Reformed Church (2013).

A third research framework on 'Christian ecotheology' is led by Prof Conradie, but includes contributions from several other colleagues and postgraduate students such as Robert Agyarko, Douglas Lawrie, Christo Lombard, Miranda Pillay and Teddy Sakupapa. This collaborative framework includes regular assessments of the state of the debate in Christian ecotheology (Conradie, 2006a, 2011, 2014), as well as subsidiary projects such as the complicity of Christianity in consumerism (Conradie, 2009, 2010b) and climate change (Conradie, 2008b; SACC, 2009), and especially an exploration from an ecological perspective of various aspects of the Christian faith such as hope for the earth (Conradie, 2005c), humanity as the 'crown of creation' (Conradie, 2005a), the 'God of life' (Conradie, 2006b, 2013) salvation (Brooks 2015; Conradie, 2010a, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2013, 2015), the Spirit (Conradie, 2012b), the church (Ayre & Conradie, 2016), sin (Cloete, 2014; Conradie, 2017; Sakuba, 2005) and aspects of the Christian liturgy. It may be noted that the monograph *The Earth in God's economy* (Conradie, 2015) was dedicated to Prof O'Connell in the year after his retirement.

A fourth research framework on 'Biblical hermeneutics and rhetoric' continued the long-standing sensitivity to plurality and ambiguity in biblical interpretation and to the role of power relationships in persuasion. This was less developed than the other research frameworks, but nevertheless produced some significant results (see Jonker & Lawrie, 2005; Pillay, 2008).

With the retirement of several staff members after 2013 (Proffs Cloete, Lawrie, Lombard & Dr Pillay), and the appointment of new staff, Prof Sarojini Nadar and Ignatius Swart in 2016, two further research frameworks were added, namely on 'Religion and Gender' (led by Prof Nadar) and

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on 'Religion and Development' (led by Proffs Klaasen and Swart). Such further developments are not covered here. Noting such staff changes provides an opportunity to mention the festschrifts that were produced for former staff members, namely for Prof Denise Ackermann (see Pillay, Nadar & Le Bruyns, 2009), Daan Cloete (Lawrie in Conradie, 2004) and Jaap Durand (Conradie & Lombard, 2009).

The Desmond Tutu Chair of Ecumenical Theology and social transformation in Africa

The vision for the establishment of an endowed Desmond Tutu Chair was articulated when the original four research frameworks were registered in May 2006. The purpose of the Chair was to support a long-standing research interest at UWC in ecumenical theology that had been evident since at least 1982, when the Belhar Confession was written on the UWC campus (see Cloete & Smit, 1984).

In the original proposal the following rationale was provided:

The Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape has proposed that an endowed "Desmond Tutu Chair of Ecumenical Theology and Social Transformation in Africa" be established in the department. This proposal seeks to honour Archbishop Tutu's legacy as long-standing Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape, as ecumenical leader, as a key figure in social transformation in Africa, most notably through his leadership of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and as a world leader on issues of justice, peace and a sustainable society. The envisaged chair will provide impetus to a number of research projects initiated by the Department of Religion and Theology, especially in the field of ecumenical theology and social transformation in the African context.

The brochure produced in launching the Chair explains Archbishop Tutu's commitment to both ecumenical theology and social transformation, the significance of such a Chair in the African context, the alignment with ongoing UWC research projects, and then comments on the 'and' that holds these two dimensions of the Chair together:

Tutu's commitment to ecumenical theology is inseparable from his dedication to social transformation. One may argue that it is his spirituality that empowers him to address social problems. At the same time, working towards social transformation stimulates and deepens his distinctive form of spirituality.

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The initiative to establish the Chair was launched in 2006 with a series of Desmond Tutu lectures, e.g. by Michael Battle, Elias Bongmba, Jesse Mugambi, Ciraj Rassool and Archbishop Tutu himself. The Chair was established in 2009 when some funding became available through the Lund Mission Society and the Evangelisches Missionswerk in Germany. Given the availability of such funds, but an inability to make an appointment against this position since November 2009, the post was restructured as a rotating chair as an interim measure. Christo Lombard occupied the chair in October and November 2012 and Charles Amjad-Ali in July and August 2013 in this capacity.

Prof Christo Lombard was subsequently appointed to the Chair from July 2013 until February 2015. His responsibilities included establishing and raising the profile of the Chair, to do fundraising towards a fully endowed chair, to facilitate the appointment of his replacement, and to exercise leadership regarding the Department's three-year project on "Ecumenical Studies and Social Ethics" (see below).

Such efforts came to fruition in 2015 when funding for an endowed chair was solicited through the Lund Mission Society. On that basis the post was again advertised and Prof Sarojini Nadar was appointed to the Chair in 2016. A South African Research Chair in Religion and Social Justice was subsequently established in partnership with the Lund Mission Society and the National Research Foundation in 2018. Prof Sarojini Nadar presently occupies the position of Desmond Tutu SARChI Research Chair in Religion and Social Justice. Such further developments are not covered here since they fall outside of the O'Connell era at UWC. Suffice it to say that senior management and Prof O'Connell in particular played a key role behind the scenes in helping to establish this Chair.

Ecumenical Studies and Social Ethics

In 2010 the Department submitted a proposal for a SARChI chair under the rubric of "Ecumenical Studies and Social Ethics", incorporating several of the existing projects in the Department. This was obviously aligned with the vision of establishing the Desmond Tutu Chair, but also indicates that such a Chair was aligned with ongoing projects and would provide further impetus to initiatives that were already in place.

This application was not successful, but the theme nevertheless stimulated a series of think tanks and public conferences on the interface between ecumenical studies and social ethics. The underlying question is how

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religion and theology, ecclesiology and ethics, spirituality and society, an ecumenical vision and moral transformation, Christianity and culture, faith and science are connected. The interest is again elicited by the 'and' in these paired concepts. The aim of this project was to identify key areas where this relationship between ecclesiology and ethics requires further reflection in the South African and wider African contexts to stimulate reflection on these areas and to provide academic leadership in the debate through a series of carefully planned publications. This series of ten think tanks and public conferences may be simply listed here with reference to major subsequent publications where appropriate.

- o Guiding visions for the transition to a post-apartheid society (Friday 9 November 2012)
- o A critical assessment of 'reconciliation' as one of the guiding visions during and beyond the transition period in South Africa (26 October 2012) (Conradie, 2013b)
- o Notions and forms of 'ecumenicity' in (South) Africa (22 February 2013) (Conradie, 2013c)
- o The quest for identity within so-called 'mainline' churches in South Africa – a one day conference with church leaders such as John de Gruchy, Stephen Brislin, Thabo Makgoba, Musawenkosi Biyela, Jerry Pillay, Peter Storey and Lindsay Rinquest (24 May 2013) (Conradie & Klaasen, 2014)
- o NGO's and FBO's as dynamos for social transformation in the Western Cape (2 August 2013)
- o Religion and moral formation towards responsible citizenship (30 August 2013)
- o Recognising current ecclesial reform/deform movements in South Africa (28 March 2014) (Conradie & Pillay, 2015)
- o The Pentecostal movement and the Ecumenical movement in Africa (30 May 2014)
- o African notions of ethical leadership (2 December 2014): Public lecture by Christo Lombard under the auspices of the launching of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society (Lombard, 2014)
- o "Ecclesiology and ethics: The state of ecumenical theology in Africa": A three-day international conference hosted at UWC (4-6 June 2015) (Conradie, Engdahl & Phiri, 2015)

This project and the related doctoral thesis by Teddy Sakupapa (2017) clearly indicate that the tension between ecclesiology and ethics is a creative one, but also that an emphasis on either the one or the other can lead to radical distortions. This tension needs to be kept alive in order

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to maintain an ecumenical vision as an immense source of inspiration, especially within the African context, to address the seven core ecumenical themes of unity, 'Faith and Order', 'Church and Society', mission and evangelism, theological education, worship and dialogue with people of other living faiths (see Conradie, 2013c).

The Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society

For some time the Department of Religion and Theology envisaged a Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society to provide an institutional context to implement the projects associated with the Desmond Tutu Chair. In February 2014, in the final year of Prof O'Connell's term of office, it formally proposed the establishment of such a third research centre in the Faculty of Arts, alongside the Centre for Humanities Research and the Centre for Multilingualism and Diversities Research. This proposal subsequently received the support of the Dean of Arts, the Arts Faculty Board, the senior management of the University and, last but not least, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu himself (with the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation). This culminated in a memorable visit to the Foundation led by Prof O'Connell (see below). The establishment of the Centre was subsequently approved by the UWC Senate and Council in June 2014 and was formally launched on 2 December 2014 with Prof Christo Lombard as the interim Director of the Centre.

Figure 13.1 The meeting with the Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Rev Mpho Tutu, Director of the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation, on 26 March 2014, where agreement was reached on the establishment of the Desmond Tutu Centre at UWC. At the back from left to right: Prof Ernst Conradie, Mr Larry Pokpas (Institutional Planner), Rev. Mpho Tutu, Prof Christo Lombard, Prof Brian O'Connell and Prof Duncan Brown (Dean of the Faculty of Arts).

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In the original proposal for such a centre the following points were made in the rationale.

1. Societies in transition, including South African society after 20 years of democracy, are necessarily engaged in processes of social transformation. Such social transformation takes place at all levels of society, including government, business and industry, civil society and universities. Reflection on and theorising about such social transformation therefore does not take place only in a university context, but universities have a crucial role in helping the rest of society to make sense of social change in South Africa amidst global developments and the many stark challenges facing humans in the 21st-century.
2. The University of the Western Cape describes itself as an 'engaged university'. This refers to the long tradition of being responsive to the needs of local communities. However, what being 'engaged' actually means in terms of projects and programmes is not always clear. It could refer to continuous education courses, outreach programmes, various forms of aid or merely marketing opportunities. Since such engagements may easily be reduced to one-directional communication, there is an obvious need for conceptual clarification in this regard.
3. All faculties at UWC are involved in the processes of social transformation and in academic reflection in this regard. The focus on social transformation is, for example, specifically mentioned in the 2012 research plan of the Faculty of Arts with reference to the role of sociology and philosophy, the Institute for Social Development, Religion and Theology, and Women and Gender Studies.
4. The Department of Religion and Theology has contributed to such studies in social transformation through a three-year project on "Ecumenical Studies and Social Ethics". This is based on the intuition that the energy behind the involvement of faith-based organisations in processes of social transformation comes from a particular ecumenical spirituality, exemplified in the life and ministry of Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu. At the same time, such a vision is always in need of clarification and does not always translate into emancipatory praxis, while religious energy is at times used for destructive purposes.
5. The establishment of the Desmond Tutu Chair of Ecumenical Theology and Social Transformation in Africa also has a narrower focus, namely to make a contribution to ecumenical discourse on the relationship between 'ecclesiology' (debates on 'Faith and Order') and 'ethics' (debates on 'Life and Work' or 'Church and Society'). There is a long-standing tension in ecumenical discourse between ecclesiology and ethics which may also be found in the African context between various forms of African inculturation

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theology, on the one hand, and theologies of liberation, reconstruction and African women's theology, on the other. The aim of the Chair is to stimulate and influence such debates on the African continent.

6. It may be noted that the interplay between ecumenical theology and social transformation lies at the core of the project. It is the elusive 'and' that is used to juxtapose the two concepts that prompts further reflection. In short, the question is this: What are the sources of moral energy to engage in social transformation, also in the face of the many obstacles that confront such engagements, when a spirit of despondency creeps in? At the same time, one is also confronted with a lack of engagement amongst (escapist) forms of religion and the destructive and abusive impact of some (fundamentalist) forms of religion. How, then, is the interplay between spirituality and society (or social transformation) to be understood?
7. The source of inspiration for such a Centre of Spirituality and Society is undoubtedly the life and ministry of Desmond Mpilo Tutu. His distinct form of spirituality and his sustained activism over many decades are well known and need to be studied in depth. The task of the Desmond Tutu Chair is partly to treasure his legacy. The best way to do that is not necessarily by focusing on Desmond Tutu's own person or on his many writings – which certainly have to be made available through digitalised archives. It would also be necessary to follow his example by being engaged in contemporary social issues and by tapping into the resources of his particular form of spirituality.

The vision was also expressed that the Centre would create a forum for the interaction between the research frameworks of the Department of Religion and Theology and the agendas of a large number of faith-based organisations (FBOs) in the Western Cape. Such interaction necessarily involves other role players engaged in social transformation in the Faculty of Arts, other faculties of the University of the Western Cape and elsewhere in civil society. Remarkably, many of these faith-based organisations have been established through the initiative of Desmond Tutu or are closely related to his ministries. Such interaction with FBOs entails a number of factors, outlined below.

Firstly, there is considerable expertise available in such faith-based organisations – so that their staff members often participate and are invited as speakers in events hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology. The centre will create opportunities to channel the dissemination of such expertise through research output. Secondly, precisely through such participation, such colleagues also shape the insights and subsequently the research agendas of members of staff in the Department of Religion and Theology. Thirdly, staff members of such faith-based organisations

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have often been invited to teach in the Department. Fourthly, most of the staff members in the Department of Religion and Theology have been or still are deeply involved in such faith-based organisations. Finally, students in the Department of Religion and Theology come from faith communities and are typically already involved in faith-based organisations. Many of the students hope to find employment in community-based organisations or faith-based organisations, if not as ordained pastors in Christian communities. Interaction therefore also indicates the need for internships and apprenticeships for students.

In summary, it was argued that the Centre would focus on a two-way interaction between academic research and the work of faith-based organisations and will invite theoretical reflection on such interaction. The Centre is therefore related to the need for a forum within which such interaction can take place. It is in this way that the Centre will help to clarify what an engaged university entails.

As indicated above, the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society was formally established in 2014. With subsequent expansive developments, in 2018 the name of the Centre was changed to the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice, with Prof Sarojini Nadar as its director.

Conclusion

The World Council of Churches spoke at its Nairobi Assembly in 1975 of a movement towards a “Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society”. This eschatological ecumenical vision is what inspires the study of religion and theology at UWC. The story of how the study of religion and theology flourished at UWC in the O’Connell era correlates with the story of ‘Becoming UWC’ (see Lalu & Murray, 2012) in that era. The identity of UWC does not lie solely in its founding documents, its proud history of struggle, or its ongoing achievements, but also in its forward projection, the bringing into being of a society that has never been. It is born from the conviction that a different world is not only necessary, but is indeed possible, and that UWC provides a pointer in that direction. This can only happen through visionary leadership and where dedicated staff members work tirelessly behind the scenes to make that possible. This is perhaps the most appropriate tribute that one could offer to Prof Brian O’Connell.

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