**Chapter 9**

# Transforming curricula into the next century: Doing theology collaboratively with local communities

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# ■ Introduction

The FT at the UP celebrates its centenary in 2017. This coincides with a renewed urgency for free, decolonised education, fuelled by student protests on campuses across the national landscape but also by theoretical discourse. Considering the transformation of curricula in SA today, in all disciplines but also in theology, cannot be done in isolation from the changing socio-historical and political-economic context of SA.

The main title of our chapter is 'transforming curricula into the next century'. This chapter aims to contribute in a small way towards imagining what curricula might look like as we enter into the next 100 years of theological education at a public university in the South African context. It can however not do so without also (very briefly) acknowledging the story of theological education at this institution in the first 100 years. 'Transforming curricula' is used in a way similar to Bosch's (1991) concept of 'transforming mission'. Not only does it speak about the transformation of curricula in terms of politics, preferences and praxis, to use the language of Steve de Gruchy (2003:451–466), as well as pedagogical approach, but it also speaks of theological curricula itself having a transformational impact on people, communities and the construction of theology itself.

The subtitle of our chapter then refers to a distinctive approach emerging from at least two spaces within the FT.These could be captured as 'doing theology collaboratively with local communities'. This chapter will unpack the emerging approaches of the CCM and the CSC, presenting the characteristics of their approaches as possible clues for grappling with transforming curricula.

A common thread in the commitments of both these centres is their actions with and on behalf of communities facing immense poverty and exclusion, aiming to facilitate healthy and sustainable communities. These are loaded and contested terms, but in the course of this chapter, we shall explicate our meaning in the use of these terms.

We consider the transformation of curricula as doing theology collaboratively with local communities in line with the Faculty Research Theme entitled '*Ecodomy*: Life in fullness' (Faculty of Theology 2013). We do, however, consider this research theme critically in the light of Letty Russell's work (1987:25–28) *Household of freedom*, hoping to contribute to freeing the theme from the risk of institutional smothering. At the same time, we allow for the theme itself to help liberate and transform curricula in order to enable a new vision and consciousness for building and multiplying 'households of freedom' as prophetic alternatives in our 'global household of bondage'. Local communities and households or families should be places that embody households of freedom and life, overcoming oppressive forces of bondage, exclusion and annihilation.

## ■ Theological education, the public university and the public good

The nature of theological education at a public university will by definition be different from theological education at a private university or a church-based theological seminary. The purpose of the public university is to serve the public good in the broadest possible sense (cf. Botman 2012:xiii–xv; Leibowitz 2012). The context within which such a university is located but also the contexts from which it draws its students need to codetermine the nature of its curricular content. It needs to offer education that will appropriately prepare students with both the consciousness and abilities to contribute critically, (de)constructively and innovatively to the socio-economic, political, environmental, spiritual and spatial well-being of individuals, communities, organisations and regions in which they are required to serve. This is an important task for theology at a public university, namely to help churches, faith communities and different religious expressions to reflect on the possible roles they could play in the public sphere with the aim of affirming life beyond the private spiritual lives of individuals only.

For this reason, theological education at a public university faces particular challenges. Theological education often represents the dominant religious or denominational persuasion of a particular tradition and therefore, at best, easily excludes people from other persuasions or traditions and at worst, contributes to giving theological or religious sanction even to oppressive regimes. The same can happen at a public university since this location, although theoretically supposedly autonomous, remains at the mercy of the government of the day and other powers that be. The challenge therefore is to shape theological curricula that could significantly contribute to the freedom and well-being of societies by presenting spaces for rigorous and critical engagement, hosting not only similarity but particularly diversity, hosting different traditions and even religious expressions and hosting contesting voices in order to become not only places of freedom and life but also what Parker Palmer (1998:90–95) speaks of as 'a community of truth' which is 'a web of communal relationships' committed to learn together. Such theological education would endeavour to mediate ongoing and multiple freedoms, both in, of and through its own curricula, of the very traditions it is hosting but also of the communities it is hosting.

The crisis of education goes deeper though. Instead of contributing towards households of freedom and life, it often only serves to perpetuate our global household of bondage, domesticating students into toeing the proverbial line, becoming servants of empire. Noam Chomsky (1989:s.p.) speaks of it as 'a system of indoctrination of the young', saying that '… the educational system is supposed to train people to be obedient, conformist, not think too much, do what you're told, stay passive, don't cause any crisis in democracy'. In his mind, what is presented as education is in fact the exact opposite of what it should be.

At first glance, the current free education movement in SA speaks mainly of the accessibility of education in terms of cost, but students actually raise much deeper questions.

Journalism professor Jane Duncan (2016) articulates it in the following way:

> My understanding of the issue is that it is about demanding that education be delivered as a public good, or as a commons, and not as a commodity. In other words, the profit motive must be removed from education delivery. (s.p.)

Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016) states the following about this student movement:

> [*T*]he emerging student archive … is unapologetically about decolonisation. The students openly embrace the black consciousness ideas of Steve Biko and Frantz Fanon's ideas on decolonisation. The students speak of changing the very idea of the university from being a 'westernized' institution into an 'African university'. (s.p.)

Students articulate a vision of reclaiming the commons but then not just any commons. They are looking for a commons that will make space for contesting voices, that will dismantle colonial constructs, that will place African voices and perspectives at the core of the educational endeavour and that will deconstruct the hierarchical nature of institutional cultures. It is a cry for ongoing liberation from past vestiges, a yearning to recreate a collective identity not defined by colonial constructs or what is perceived to be constructs of whiteness. While this cry cannot be engaged with in an uncritical way, it cannot be ignored either.

Theological education at an African public university should not only embrace a movement of ongoing liberation and self-assertion but actually needs to lead the way to discerning and constructing liberating and transforming curricula. We owe it to the contexts in which we are called to do life-giving theology. Even more, we need to allow these contexts to shape our theological questions and emphases, but we also need to consider how we can do better theology in these contexts, in collaboration with local communities and silenced voices. It is in inviting such voices to disrupt our theological constructs and in dealing creatively with them that life-giving transformations can start to occur.

# ■ Theological education at the University of Pretoria

Even though the UP always used to be a public university, the FT – at least since 1938 – almost exclusively served students of the white DRC and the NRC, and all faculty members also came from these churches. At the onset, in 1916, it was a collaboration between the NRC and the PC (Wethmar 2000:417). At that point, the DRC in Transvaal did not want to participate as it did not want to jeopardise unity in the DRC having already had, at that stage, a Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch.

There were some exceptions with a few (white) students from churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission or the Evangelies Gereformeerde Kerk enrolling at the UP However, in essence this was a faculty for white students, serving mostly two white denominations steeped in Reformed theology. Since 1938, the DRC joined, and it marked the beginning of the long collaboration between the NRC and the DRC. This collaboration was not unproblematic though as both churches have been steeped in deep-seated controversies for more than a century before 1938 (Wethmar 2000:418). This eventually led to the strange arrangement of having two separate faculties of theology for these two churches at the same University.

Only in 1998, following radical changes in the South African political landscape, did this change when a document was adopted that paved the way for an ecumenical or multi-church faculty to be developed. This also led to the amalgamation of the previously separate faculties of theology into one new faculty (Wethmar 2000:421–424). Today the formal partner churches in the FT are the DRC, the NRC, the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. In addition, a growing number of students from a range of traditions, from Roman Catholic to African Initiated Churches

to independent Pentecostal and Charismatic groups, study at the faculty.

Wethmar (2000) argues about the ecumenicity that was introduced in 1997 in the following way:

> It is, however, important to take note of the fact that ecumenicity in this case is not indicative of confessional indifference. It does not imply non-denominationality, but rather denominations in dialogue. This again implies that each participating church can have its students educated without alienating them from their church tradition, and simultaneously they can be trained to cope with the demands of being church in a plural society. (pp. 426–427)

The weakness of this model might be for those students who do not come from large and well-resourced denominations or traditions, who might find themselves isolated if the emphasis remains on participating churches.

Wethmar (2000:416), in the abstract to his article that explains the changes that occurred in the FT between 1997 and 1999, says '[d]uring the past three years the FT at the University of Pretoria was involved in a profound process of transformation.' The article provides a clear overview of the changing nature of the Faculty with an emphasis on the shift towards a more ecumenical Faculty. Of concern is the article's silence about the socio-political context in which the Faculty flourished during its first 80 years of existence although the author recognises it in saying that the scope and space available for the article did not allow an in-depth exploration of this issue (Wethmar 2000:419–420). The article also strikes one as suggestive of transformation as a complete product that occurred between 1997 and 1999, not acknowledging the depth of (de)construction that subsequently had to take place to enter into a completely new dispensation.

In order to enter the next 100 years with a vision of contributing to the public good, it is important to call into memory where we have come from at first. Theological education at the UP did not originate in a proverbial vacuum. It took place within the context

of an Afrikaner Nationalist institution informed by so-called Christian values. Universities such as Pretoria, Stellenbosch and Potchefstroom were the custodians of the dominant consciousness of the apartheid ideology and also, predominantly, served to transfer the values associated with this consciousness. As part of these institutions, the faculties of theology obviously played the role of providing theological sanction to the system of the day and for most of the time and for most of its faculty members, uncritically so. There were only a few dissenting voices during this time.

Almost 20 years after the initial transformation process that had started in 1997 and had led to a new multi-church faculty in 1998, critical challenges remain, partly because transformation is an ongoing process. Firstly, the legacy of the first 100 years cannot simply be erased without a very deliberate and deep transformation processes, undoing the wrongs of the past systematically, maintaining what is still valuable and boldly constructing new futures. This would include a fresh imagination for both curricular transformation and the kind of institutional culture required for hosting a transforming curriculum. Although the FT has become a multi-church faculty, a possible danger is that the balance of power remains with the original two churches or with the formal church partners. This might be so even though the majority of new students entering the faculty every year come from a variety of denominations and increasingly also from black independent Pentecostal churches that do not necessarily have the same leverage to influence curricula or institutional practices. Ways need to be found that will allow for the diversity of churches represented in the faculty to contribute to the critical accompaniment of and reflection on the ways in which the faculty offers theological education and formation.

Secondly, the faculty probably does not appreciate adequately the contexts from which the growing majority of our students come if the curricula are not emerging from within the realities and demands of those contexts simply because the majority of faculty members do not come from such contexts themselves.

Transforming curricula would need to ask much deeper and more foundational questions of both the content, structure and methodology of the current curricula than simply making cosmetic changes. We need to gain a much clearer understanding of who our students are and of what it is that they would engage with on completing their studies. The traditional concept of a full-time minister called by a resourced congregation to serve in pastoral ministry is almost non-existent for many, if not most, of the new generation of students in our faculty. For many of them, ministry will be a part-time engagement. Others articulate visions of returning to their communities of origin to help break the cycle of poverty, to serve girl children at risk or to do something else related to community development or community transformation. It is important to make a special effort to ensure that current curricula are preparing the growing number of students to engage meaningfully in their future ministry because the nature of the contexts with which they would have to engage is vastly different from the contexts for which the faculty is used to prepare students. Even the contexts in which the traditional students of the faculty – white students from the DRC and NRC – will find themselves are increasingly multicultural contexts with growing socio-economic challenges.

Mainstreaming the diaconal function of the church – expressed in community development or social enterprises – into curricula for theological education might be one of the most appropriate and timely contributions of theological education at a public university. In a context of deep inequalities that threaten to derail the frail democracy we have gained, such a contribution should not be underplayed. Theologically, it belongs to the essence of a servant church. How best can students be prepared both theologically and practically to be agents of such a church, making deep social changes, fostering a consciousness that will build households of freedom and life wherever they find themselves? How best can students be prepared to be critical and imaginative thinkers who will construct solutions with communities, as theological imperative, to some of society's

most pressing problems? Our submission is that the answer to these questions lies in transforming curricula and pedagogical methodologies in order to enable just that.

Transforming curricula would include participation in the current decolonising debates and discourses, acknowledging as a starting point the Christian accompaniment of colonial expansion and exploitation. Already as far back as 1981, the Caribbean theologian Noel Erskine (1981) pleaded for the decolonisation of theology. Not only should a transformed curriculum stand in the sign of decolonising education, but it should also contribute to pedagogies that continue to decolonise (cf. Tejeda, Espinoza & Gutierrez 2003). Just as the 'rainbow nation' was a vision seeking to evoke a new imagination among a deeply divided people, requiring hard, consistent work in order for the 'rainbow' to become a reality, so decolonising the minds of both formerly oppressed and oppressor and decolonising institutions and curricula will not be an overnight process. It should, however, be a deliberate process of creating spaces for hard conversations in which vestiges of a colonial consciousness should be unmasked, named and transformed collectively into an alternative consciousness.

One of the challenging tasks would be to foster, amidst the diversity of theologies and personalities working at the FT, a collective consciousness or vision, going into the future. The diversity does not have to be an obstacle and could in fact be a gift if it does not continue to foster separation but contribute to a new and rich consciousness that is rooted theologically. Again, gleaning from the student movements and other social movements around the country – such as Abahlalibase Mjondolo and others – critical theological engagement with the work and thought of Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, Mahmood Mamdani and others are extremely important in considering curricula for theological education today. These voices as well as the voices of all people who live and work in the many contexts of our part of the world, those living within the context of urban and rural poverty and those who are rich, those who work and those who do not work, those who suffer and those who do not suffer, the oppressed and the oppressor all give

us insight into the nature and dynamics of our context and help us to see how the God of the Bible is indeed God with us, mediating a way towards freedom and life.

If we are not able to engage such voices critically – as signs of the times – and if we are not open to learn from their insights at the same time, not only theological education but our very theologies will be relegated to the margins with no credible role to play in terms of contributing to the public good.

Working collaboratively with local communities and starting with the diverse perspectives of those that live in the contexts where our students will serve, are important shifts required for a decolonised, contextually appropriate curriculum.

In the rest of this chapter, we consider two spaces within the FT in which a deliberately transdisciplinary approach is emerging, doing theology collaboratively with local communities. We would like to present such an emerging approach as a possible contribution to considering transforming curricula in the direction of a decolonised, inclusive paradigm, doing theology with and doing theology from below.

## ■ Considering the Centre for Contextual Ministry and the Centre for Sustainable Communities: Attempting to do theology collaboratively with local communities

Institutes, centres and units at the UP exist to consolidate the research, teaching and community-engagement activities of the university. Often, research themes spanning across disciplines are hosted in these entities.

The two centres reflected upon here were established at different times, from different theological disciplines and with different aims. Over the years, however, a remarkable similarity

has developed regarding the questions and issues we engage with, albeit in different ways.

In what follows, we provide an overview of the two centres. We then trace the outline of a common paradigm that we see developing, considering how it could perhaps contribute to rethinking curricula.

## ■ The Centre for Contextual Ministry

The CCM was established in 1993 to address the need of church leaders and ministry practitioners who lacked access to formal theological education. Malan Nel saw this need and conceptualised a centre that could offer continuous education, equipping grass-root leaders for ministries in context. Starting at the Vista University, the Centre was absorbed into the FT at the UP in 1999 when Vista closed its doors and merged with other universities across the country.

Today the Centre combines a strong continuous-education portfolio with a growing emphasis on engaged, transdisciplinary research. More than 1000 students are certified annually for courses taken with the Centre in four thematic clusters, namely leadership studies, healing and counselling, organisational and congregational development, and urban and community transformation. In addition, the Centre hosts four research themes dealing with faith in the city (including homelessness, housing, migration and urban theological education); social cohesion and reconciliation (including spatial justice, restitution, our collective woundedness and languages of engagement); children, faith and society (including methodologies for doing child theology, children and youth at risk) and spirituality and health (including the role of spirituality in health-care systems, paediatric health care and mental health).

The Centre remains committed to its original vocation which was to offer access to theological training for people who lack such access. However, over the years, the continuous-educational

offering was diversified. It now includes basic courses for people with Grade-10 qualifications, short advanced courses on a range of topics and one and two-year programmes offered as specialisations and accepted as course work towards honours and master's degrees in PT.

The Centre's students are all practitioners and therefore bring into the classroom setting a rich pool of knowledge and experience. In its pedagogical methodology, the Centre increasingly tries to find innovative ways of sharing knowledge instead of traditional modes of knowledge transfer in which so-called 'experts' disseminate knowledge downward, so to speak (cf. De Beer 2014a; De Beer 2014b:132–136). We also seek ways for the classroom to be in different social locations than only that of a suburban university campus. The contexts in which people serve become the classrooms, offering rich possibilities for transforming curricula.

Since 2012, a number of shifts have occurred in the Centre as it enters its next 20 years. Firstly, the Centre is asserting and locating itself much clearer within the framework and self-understanding of contextual theologies as they have emerged over the past decades. In terms of methodology, epistemology, a preferential option for the poor and generating knowledge from below, it seeks to be consistent with contextual paradigms everywhere. It therefore also reviews its course offerings in terms of a clearer praxis approach to doing theology, helping our students to embrace their own agency as reflective practitioners or practising theologians. The person and context of the participant (student) becomes the central locus of theological reflection instead of abstract theological concepts that then have to be translated (sometimes forced) into local contexts. The emphasis on local agency also has the potential to contribute to deconstructing theologies from below.

A second important shift is to embrace a second pillar alongside our focus on continued education. Since 2014, when our Board adopted such a resolution, the Centre has also been focusing on engaged, transdisciplinary research in four areas as

outlined above. There were different reasons for this shift. On the one hand, the Centre wanted to align itself to the University's research focus and its Policy on Units, Centres and Institutes. Equally important, however, is the Centre's commitment to root its educational offering in dedicated and engaged research that will help to continuously inform, deepen, assess and revise its course offerings and course contents. Lastly, the research themes hosted also give a clear indication as to the focus areas to which the Centre is committed for ongoing research, teaching and action. Our sense is that our research themes and the chosen research methodologies inherently carry the possibility to contribute rather directly to the public and common good.

A third shift or, at least more intentional emphasis, is the work that the Centre does on campus and in relationship to other existing initiatives, projects, departments or centres at the UP. The Centre aligns itself to the Faculty Research Theme, '*Ecodomy:* Life in fullness' (Faculty of Theology 2013). In practice but also theoretically, the Centre's own point of departure is the 'extreme un-fullness of life' experienced by a large percentage of people in South African communities, mediated by or evident in inequality, poverty, violence, different forms of exclusion or discrimination, spatial fragmentation, corruption and poor governance as well as racial, economic or gender divides. We contemplate speaking about fullness of life from within such contexts of 'extreme un-fullness' and reflect on constructing appropriate faith and community responses that could start to usher in viable and just alternatives. Our point of departure for theological engagement and reflection is therefore to shift our social location, not only in the abstract but even physically, from a suburban university campus to the contexts in which such un-fullness are mostly expressed. That is why we are exploring the possibility of a satellite office on the Mamelodi Campus of the University with the expressed desire to connect with the growing informal settlements of Mamelodi East as a space of learning and possible transformation of our own curricula.

The Centre also aligns itself with the Capital Cities Institutional Research Theme at the UP (Faculty of Humanities 2013), which focuses on ways in which space, justice and belonging are mediated, or not, in capital cities. In our case, we are focusing on the City of Tshwane, but we are in conversation with other cities in the Global South. This is not an accidental alignment but stems from a deep-seated conviction that transforming curricula in theological education generally, but particularly at the UP would fail to respond adequately to the local and regional context in which it is situated if it does not reflect deliberately on its urban realities. The UP is located in the Gauteng City Region with 13.2 million. Projections are that this City Region will have more than 20 million people by 2025, making it one of the fastest growing urban metropolitan regions in the world. Massive urban migration, deepening inequalities, challenges concerning the urban environment, emerging social movements and the emergence of diverse religious expressions in the face of such urban complexity warrant dedicated theological enquiry and action. Our faculty is particularly well located to respond to this challenge innovatively.

The Centre collaborates widely with other disciplines on campus on issues ranging from poverty and justice to higher-education transformation to social cohesion and reconciliation.

In August of every year, the Centre is leading a collective of students and academics in a project called 'feast@UP', committed to the formation of citizenship for social justice (cf. De Beer 2014b). It does so in conjunction with an annual community festival, the Feast of the Clowns, hosted by the Tshwane Leadership Foundation (TLF). During this festival, semester courses in some departments at the University are aligned to the theme of the festival, students are encouraged to participate in workshops and events associated with the festival, academic colloquiums are hosted on campus and various creative tools such as poetry, film and music are employed to explore issues of justice, both theoretically and very concretely and practically.

Since 2012, the Centre has expanded and solidified its network, and it has been doing its research mostly in close collaboration with faith-based or civil-society organisations committed to similar themes in order to allow for local contexts to inform our research questions, to shape research findings and to contribute to the generation of new knowledge and insights. We are, however, also collaborating with organisations that have similar research findings to potentially contribute directly to local communities (De Beer 2014b:132–136). In its research on faith in the city, the 'feast@UP' programme and the Urban Studio, which is a trans-disciplinary space for action, reflection, dialogue and research, hosting much of the Centre's urban agenda, the Centre is collaborating closely with the TLF (cf. De Beer 2012, 2014b). Stephan de Beer, who is the Director of the Centre, has been the founder and leader of the TLF from 1993 to 2013 and still remains actively involved with inner-city issues, particularly in the areas of homelessness and social housing.

The Village of Support is the Centre's incubator for child and youth-development training programmes. The Centre has collaborated closely with the Royal Bafokeng Institute and the Phokeng Ministers' Fraternal over the years, responding with educational offerings to expressed needs from within this community and after incubating the courses in Rustenburg-Phokeng rolling them out for presentation elsewhere (cf. Van der Walt, Swart & De Beer 2014).

Similarly, the Centre is hosting Hospivision, a faith-based organisation, for a research project entitled Spirituality and Health (De la Porte 2016). Hospivision provides pastoral services in both public and private hospitals across the country, backed up by solid ongoing research on the relationship between spirituality and health and in particular, spirituality and institutional health care. In a recent article, De la Porte explored the contribution of spirituality and pastoral work as well as faith-based communities and faith-based organisations to 'holistic people-centred health care in South Africa'.

In conversation with the Petra Institute and the Child Theology Africa Network as well as with practitioners and activists engaged in restorative justice, reconciliation and restitution work or social

justice work, the Centre develops its research agendas around children, faith and society, and social cohesion and reconciliation, respectively. These collaborations help ensure the transdisciplinary nature of the research projects on which the Centre embarks. Research outputs do not exist in a vacuum but are shared in ways that can transform local practices almost immediately.

## ■ The Centre for Sustainable Communities

The idea for a CSC has evolved out of the Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research (IMER). IMER was established in 1979 by the DRC when this church's missionary movement was already in sharp decline as Saayman (2007; quoting G. van der Watt) indicates:

> The total number of DRC missionaries (ordained as well as lay, both foreign and home missionaries) shrunk from 1078 to 551 in four short years between 1973 and 1977; and the total number of ordained missionaries declined from 308 to 192 during the same period. (p. 108)

What remained of the movement continued to collapse. By the end of the 1980s, there was little left of what was once a strong movement in SA and neighbouring countries. IMER did not survive the demise of the missionary movement and for a long time, has had no capacity to do independent work. It existed only as a meeting place or connection between other entities. In IMER's place, the CSC is in the process of being registered. Its future is uncertain and depends, among others, on the ways in which questions such as those discussed below are answered.

IMER was related to Missiology and to the missionary paradigm. This paradigm can be described as follows: The church sends a missionary somewhere to preach the gospel, to call people to be saved by believing in Jesus Christ and to plant a church (e.g. Kritzinger, Meiring & Saayman 1994).

In the meantime, another paradigm that we call the missional paradigm has been evolving. This paradigm can be described as

follows: God sends the local congregation to engage with its local context, to help heal all relationships (with God, with each other, with creation) and to be witnesses in word and deed of the *missio Dei*, namely that God is taking world history on its way to the end where the whole creation, the household of God, will experience both freedom and the fullness of life. An important part of the shift from a missionary to a missional paradigm is a deep appreciation for God's presence in places where we became involved before arriving there. With that comes a great sensitivity and respect for and understanding of what God is doing in certain localities and for local people and communities, seeking to collaborate with and strengthen what already exists instead of doing things for people.

An important guideline in understanding what God is doing can be found in the theme of 'wholeness of life or life in its fullness'. This theme, with related terms such as life-affirming and life-giving relationships, practices and ministries, has been a central theme in many church circles in the world over the last number of years. Life-giving theology is the motto of the FT at the UP and it gives more content to its research theme, '*Ecodomy:* Life in fullness'. The 2013 General Synod of the DRC accepted a document on the mission of the church which states that a missional congregation is called to restore relationships in a broken world and to live according to God's plan for his creation (Algemene Sinode 2013:9). This policy document resonates with documents in churches in the rest of the world, over a broad spectrum, such as the document *Together towards life* in the Resource Book of the WCC of 2012, documents of the Roman Catholic Church such as the encyclicals *Caritas in veritate* (Benedict XVI 2009) and *Laudato Si', On care for our common home* (Franciscus 2015) as well as documents such as Balia and Kim (2010), Edinburgh 2010, volume II: *Witnessing to Christ today* (Van Niekerk 2015:3).

The theological reflection on the missional paradigm and the involvement of the local congregation to promote the fullness of life in and with her local communities are well developed. Much work has been done regarding the leadership that is

needed to convince a local congregation of its calling to be so involved. The gap that the Centre sets out to fill is to develop the resources (knowledge, skills, networks, funding, etc.) that are needed to engage constructively with very complex and massive issues such as overcoming poverty, developing sustainable practices and caring for vulnerable children. What is the best that a congregation can do, given its identity, calling and limited capacity? The other gap that the Centre fills is to develop the resources in local communities in collaboration with local people.

These were the questions that IMER and the Centre have struggled with over the last decade or two. A major obstacle has been that, as the former missionary movement phased out, IMER's financial support from the DRC has been receding since the early 1990s. The new missional movement is still taking shape and has not gained enough momentum to fund a new research centre, even if such a centre is needed.

The only way to do some research was by way of a partnership. IMER and the Centre have been cooperating with the Nova Institute since 1994 when Nova started out as an independent one-man NGO. Attie van Niekerk, who was the director of Nova, started to work as a part-time researcher at IMER and lecturer in Missiology in 1997. When J.J. Kritzinger retired in 2002, Van Niekerk became director of IMER. At the time, Nova was making good progress as a consultant for industry and government departments, focusing on aspects of the daily life of low-income households and communities such as energy use and food production. We were convinced that these topics were relevant for what IMER was working towards, but we did not know how all of it would come together.

In 2003, IMER and Nova entered into a joint venture that was called the Functional Household Programme. Nova was about to sign a contract with an industry to reduce air pollution caused by the use of coal in low-income households in certain townships. An agreement was reached that the contract would be signed by three parties: Nova, the industry and the UP on behalf of IMER. This opened the way to apply for funding from

Technology and Human Resources for Industry Programme (THRIP), an arm of the national government's Department of Trade and Industry. The Department instituted THRIP to support research and development that would promote the competitiveness of industries in the country. The joint venture was a success. In September 2005, the Functional Household Programme received the THRIP Excellence Award for Social Development from the minister of Trade and Industry.

Today, Nova has grown into a social enterprise with 23 full-time staff members of which six are former students of the FT. Nova's vision is a healthy household culture in Southern Africa. It develops and promotes ways (models, products, technology, practices) to improve the quality of life of households. It specialises in ventures such as developing and implementing sustainable and effective patterns for domestic energy use, practices for small-scale commercial farming that use conservation farming methods and cooperation between the local church and households in caring for orphans and vulnerable children, whose numbers have increased sharply in recent years.

Nova is an independent organisation that works with industries, government departments, knowledge institutions, churches and NGOs. Cooperating with Nova is a good example of the types of joint venture that the church needs in order to increase its capacity and effectivity. Many similar partnerships are needed. However, our sense is also that such an approach could help redefine and reshape the nature of theological curricula, namely the way in which different insights, experiences and views are shared to provide students with a richer exposure to various disciplines and diverse contexts. This is important for academic and practicing theologians, community developers and social activists.

Berkhof (1973:364) regards diaconal service as one of nine institutional instruments of the church for transferring the fullness of life given by Christ. Both the seriousness of the Christian message and the seriousness of many people's needs require that diaconal work be taken much more seriously than before.

The way in which the Centre must be structured in future is uncertain, but there is clearly a need for research if the church is to engage in a meaningful way in the issues of our time. Although the Centre has no source of funding, the role it has played as connector that brings together different role players will remain a minimum role that it can continue to play in future. One example is that, since 2007, the Centre has formally hosted 20 students from the Netherlands who did field work as part of their studies with Nova. This is leading to longer-term partnerships.

The Centre fills the gap that was indicated in 1938 by Karl Barth in his essay *Rechfertigung und Recht* ([Justification and justice]; official English title *Church and state*). Barth (1960) says that there was a gap in the theology of the Reformers, namely the following:

> [*They did not set out what the*] inner and vital connection is between service of God in Christian living … in the worship of the Church as such, and another form of service, which may be described as a 'political' service of God …. (pp. 101–102)

The 'political' service of God refers to the affairs of human justice and life in general. If there is no such inner connection, it would be possible to build a highly spiritual message and a very spiritual church, a message that has ceased to seek or find any entrance into the sphere of these problems of human justice – as has happened with Pietistic sterility. In contrast, one can build a very effective society which has lost contact with the vital values and direction that we as humans cannot provide for ourselves. Barth (1960:104–105) blames this separation, at least partly, on the gap in the Reformers' teaching, and he sets out to correct it in his context.

The gap between faith and everyday life that was mentioned by Barth is relevant for the relationship between Nova and the Centre but also for the relationship between theological education at the UP and grass-root communities, particularly communities of struggle. Nova has established itself as a social enterprise, not a church organisation or even an overtly Christian organisation. We do, however, read the Bible and pray at our meetings and remind ourselves that we are not

ashamed of the gospel and that we have to remain ready to give account of the hope that is in us. Nova is involved in the affairs of everyday life but searches for ways to incorporate the results of its work into the ministry of the church, to contribute to a more meaningful diaconal service. The ministry of the church traditionally does not include an active and highly developed involvement, with non-church organisations, in the everyday issues of local communities that we are facing today. We need to go wider than the tradition, for example in the DRC, of social workers working as professionals in and with the church.

The serious levels of un-fullness of life in our context are not issues that we traditionally dealt with. Many of these issues are both new and massive: Climate change, the huge numbers of HIV-positive parents and vulnerable children, the levels of urbanisation and the scale of informal housing and homelessness were not key issues that the church had to deal with in previous centuries.

Nova has a core group of theologians who work with engineers, architects, agriculturalists, medical scientists, statisticians, anthropologists and others. However, the question remains how we can bridge the gap between faith and life, between what organisations such as Nova do and the ministry of the church. This is a question for both the Centre and Nova.

One can raise another question in the context of considering transforming curricula, namely whether the issues articulated above should not become the starting points for our theological engagement. Instead of abstract theologising that is applied in practise afterwards, allowing for our different theological disciplines to be brought to bear on specific societal challenges where un-fullness or un-freedom flourish, should we not imagine possible theological alternatives, even solutions, in the light of our theological and other sources? This will constitute a rather decisive shift from the current theological curriculum and pedagogy.

# ■ An emerging transdisciplinary paradigm: Clues for transforming curricula?

A common, and complementary, transdisciplinary paradigm seems to be emerging in the approaches taken by the two Centres. We suggest that clues for transforming curricula are hidden in some of the characteristics of this paradigm.

We are rooted in a 'lived faith' (cf. Gutierrez 1988:xxxiv), searching for the way in which serving God in the liturgy relates to serving God in everyday life (in the household, in the community and/or in the public square)

We are concerned with and take as point of departure in our methodology the fundamental issues of our context. These include the search for a better quality of life and indeed structural transformation as part of the struggle against destructive forces such as dire poverty. They also include the gap between rich and poor; the interlinked questions of identity, urbanisation and migration; the destruction of the ecology; gender issues; scourges such as HIV and malnutrition; and how the church and theology can exercise a preferential option for the poor.

Wearer convinced that the Christian faith has something of fundamental importance to contribute in the search for meaningful responses to these fundamental issues, the search for a way that leads to life. At the same time, however, we are convinced that Christendom has helped to create many of the colonial and apartheid constructs and the systems and oppressions with which we are still contending in communities today (cf. Terreblanche 2014). Our research, teaching and engagement in communities therefore also seek to offer a deep and rigorous critique of Christendom and the socio-ecclesial constructs it has birthed while seeking to foster radically re-imagined socio-cultural-ecclesial possibilities.

We believe that our search for preferred realities must integrate faith, action, socio-ecclesial analysis, the rigorous discipline of scientific and interdisciplinary reflection and inquiry, and bold action. We embrace as methodological framework for doing theology the praxis approach of Holland and Henriot, and we are also deeply informed by Freire's pedagogical approach, at least in the CCM.

We believe that our contribution must become clear in the process of working with others who do not necessarily share our faith, but who are also seeking for answers to the same issues. We are still learning, but in practice, both of us are network organisations – networking and networked. By seeking together, we hope to enter into the 'dialogue of life', which Bevans and Schroeder (2004:383) regard as the foundation for any other kind of dialogue, and the dialogue of action. The dialogue of life is the way in which we live with people of other convictions in the affairs of daily life, and the dialogue of action is the way in which we work together to solve problems that threaten all of us. We do not approach these issues with ready-made answers, but, drawing from the narrative approach's not-knowing posture, we agree with Sophie Oldfield (2013) that '… the notion of engaged research challenges us to think carefully about the relationships in which and through which research is sustained'.

Different relationships must be considered:

- *The relationship between different theological disciplines*: Contextual approaches to doing theology are in essence interdisciplinary, subverting knowledge or disciplinary hierarchies and starting its reflection with people in local contexts, often from below. In reflecting on contextual challenges, we draw on the diversity of theological resources and disciplinary insights to reflect responsibly and to construct appropriate proposals for alternative practices and better communities. We are able to navigate between disciplines, often having worked in disciplines other than our current ones, not being exclusively 'married' to a particular discipline. Rigorous theological and scientific inquiry that is at the same

time contextual and action-oriented does not allow itself to be constrained by often artificial disciplinary boundaries.

- **The relationship with other sciences:** We realise that the questions of our time cannot be grasped by one scientific discipline alone. We must work with other sciences. Theologians must learn from others, and we must make our own contribution to the broad scientific endeavour to understand our context. One of our contributions may be that we could try to understand something of the role of religion in shaping the everyday lives of people.
- **The relationship with people of other faiths:** In terms of migration, for example, we try to understand how the faith sensibilities of people, whether Christian, traditional African, Muslim or Buddhist, sustain people in their difficult migratory journeys. We also try to understand how religious constructs help perpetuate or heal prejudice and other fractures in urban society. We find helpful the concept of 'prophetic dialogue', as described by Bevans and Schroeder, which maintains the elements of sincere dialogue with sharing our own faith.
- **The relationship with people within the context:** We believe that our search for a way forward must be done *with* people who struggle in their own lives with the fundamental issues mentioned above. It is not a purely theoretical matter, and it cannot be done in isolation from what actually happens in our context. This is consistent with contextual or narrative approaches of doing theology in which alternative stories are coconstructed or alternatives to the status quo are ushered in by people and communities themselves, practising agency deliberately, even against the odds. Schreiter (1985) speaks of the community as theologians when he describes the process of constructing local theologies. Our Centres deliberately seek to subvert knowledge hierarchies that often tend to locate knowledge narrowly and exclusively in academic institutions at the expense of retrieving local, community or indigenous knowledge and wisdom wherever they are to be found.

Implicit in the emerging approach outlined above is an embrace of *liminality* as the necessary posture for transforming or transformational leadership – searching for solutions for the world's most pressing challenges in the threshold spaces between races and

groups, powerful and powerless, church and society, academic and non-academic institutions, chaos and order, the already and the not-yet. It is precisely in the liminal spaces where one finds the uncertainty of new realities with new challenges, where innovative responses are often birthed, but without an embrace of the gift of liminality, our certainties often prevent the innovative new beginnings.

Wepener (2015a) proposes not only a position but a spirituality of liminality for doing qualitative ethnographic liturgical research in a postcolonial African context. He unpacked this more in his inaugural lecture as Head of the Department of PT at the UP, suggesting that such spirituality should be what root this Department in a postcolonial (decolonising?) time such as this. Waaijman (2002) describes a liminal spirituality as being in an uncertain place, virtual outsiders, paradox '[y]et, there is a current of life here: creativity, community, equality, vital energy, insight, imagination, wholeness, naturalness.' Liminal spaces often give birth to spiritualities 'outside the established cadres of culture' (Waaijman 2002), namely the spirituality of exile, the spirituality of the desert fathers, spiritualities formed outside established religious orders or spirituality lived as loneliness (disconnectedness) in the very connected modern mass culture.

The previous arguments can be combined in a growing sense that a distinctive feature of our emerging approach is the transdisciplinary nature of our work. We insist on scholarship – teaching, research and engagement in and with communities – that embraces processes where researchers from different disciplines and people who are in the actual situation put their heads together to search for meaningful solutions to concrete problems with which people in the particular situation are struggling. Klein (2001:4) puts it succinctly '[t]he core idea of transdisciplinarity is different academic disciplines working jointly with practitioners to solve a real-world problem.'

In the CCM, we practice trans-disciplinarity, for example, in our Urban Studio where researchers, practitioners, activists and community members consider local urban challenges

together, articulate research questions and through research and conversation seek to construct shared and new knowledge and understanding that has the potential to be liberating or transformational. Another example is an extensive homelessness research project, entitled 'Pathways out of homelessness', which created different spaces in which homeless and former homeless individuals, civil-society organisations, city officials and politicians, and researchers and students collaboratively considered homelessness, its causes, possible solutions or sustainable pathways out of it. A result was to develop and recommend an integrated policy and strategy on street people for the City of Tshwane, elements of which are already implemented by different organisations in the city.

Nova's approach, which is shared by the CSC is based on the realisation that solutions that have worked in one context may not work in another. In fact, they often do more harm than good. Household residents must be involved in the process to design the appropriate solution(s) that would satisfy their specific needs in their context. This is done, in practice, when a concrete problem is addressed, for example air pollution caused by the domestic use of coal, the depletion of wood sources in rural areas due to the domestic use of wood, the dire need for a better quality of life for vulnerable children. It is done by way of a transdisciplinary research and development process in which researchers from different backgrounds and a representative number of household members put their heads together to reach consensus on the needs and problems and to decide together what the best potential products and/or processes are to solve those problems.

The most promising solutions are implemented on a small scale and are then evaluated, improved and iterated again until one of them complies with all the set criteria. That is the first milepost. The second is to find ways in which such solutions can be taken to scale. The church has the mission and the values, the infrastructure (from synodical committees to congregations in local communities) and dedicated members to make it ideal for

bringing some of these solutions to people. Where that happens, our dream of the church and the Centre mutually helping each other becomes reality.

The examples above clearly embody a way of doing theology collaboratively with communities, congregations and (faith-based) non-profit organisations. The strong focus on local congregations and local communities, as locales for theological action-reflection, combined with a strong social enterprise paradigm (as found in Nova), maintaining high levels of excellence and putting a high premium on results that can be measured and monitored, could contribute to both the contexts and the competencies for transforming curricula. Instead of serving the rather narrow constituencies of the traditional church partners only, such an approach could considerably broaden the partner base to include a more diverse range of church partners as well as faith-based (and other) social enterprises and local communities. In such a way, mutuality will be fostered through which both the FT and the partners could contribute to each other in terms of a liberating or transforming agenda.

Lastly, the emerging approach in our Centres tends to be overtly political, in the sense of 'political' service to God as Barth described it, expressed in a deep concern with the management of the *polis*; the daily human affairs of cities, communities and households; the ways in which resources are managed and distributed or monopolised and denied. This is also a natural alignment with the broader Faculty Research Theme (FRT) which is '*Ecodomy:* Life in fullness'[50]. The Centres concern themselves very intentionally with economic, environmental

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50. *Ecodomy* is a translation of the Greek word *oikodome* which means 'to build the household'. *Oikos* is the root word from which words such as economy, ecology and ecumenical are derived. Theologically, these words all deal with God's concern for the household of creation, the household of humanity and ways in which resources are shared, distributed or managed (stewarded) in the household

and socio-political matters in everyday public life, in cities and in local communities. It does so, however, from a strong sense that everything is not well in the household and that cleansing is needed first in order to build households of freedom, to use Russell's language. It is in the (seemingly tame) acts of cleansing that theological discourse will find its liberating or transforming posture, replacing domesticated forms of theological education with processes that are raising consciousness and liberating both theology and students alike to be able to discern and be disentangled from colonial and other shackles and to be nurtured towards being agents building households of freedom instead.

## ◼ Into the future …: Doing theology collaboratively with local communities?

Based on the unfolding foci and methodologies of our two Centres over the past few years, as described above, we seem to have developed certain shared or overlapping thematic interests which probably call for greater synergy and collective action. Also, a certain theological methodology has developed that emphasises collaboration with local communities, congregations or organisations in finding solutions for societal challenges.

Centres at universities tend to be innovative and entrepreneurial in approach, not having the same institutional constraints as academic departments. The innovations practiced or discovered in centres are often not captured or articulated well enough, and yet they could become contributors to transforming curricula.

At the heart of this chapter, we argue for a transdisciplinary approach that will do theology collaboratively with communities, in liminal spaces. Recognising the past 100 years of the Faculty's life and acknowledging that curricula were never neutral theologically or politically and often supportive of the status quo, this chapter pleads for the FT at the UP to once again take sides but this time in a drastically different way. Russel Botman (2012)

reflected on the role of the public university, and borrowing from him, we would argue that this should be the particular role of a transforming theological curriculum at a public university:

> The time has come for universities to take sides. They cannot just be players on the field – they need to pick a side. And that side should be the public good. Emphasising the public good is a choice for the marginalised, for the poor, for struggling communities. If universities choose to follow this route, their influence starts growing because they are no longer just impacting on the terrain of policy but concretely contributing to the remaking of the world. (p. xv)

We could be complicit with neo-colonial paradigms that once again deny some a place under the sun, or we could usher in a new era of doing theology, collaboratively with communities, and in doing so, we could help remake the world with people, multiplying households of freedom.

# ■ Summary: Chapter 9

The FT at the UP celebrates its first century of existence in 2017. This chapter is an attempt to draw from the emerging approach in both the CCM and the CSC, asking whether it perhaps offers clues for transforming curricula as we enter our second century. The chapter seeks to offer a vision for doing theology collaboratively with communities, in liminal spaces, opening up a transdisciplinary approach to theological engagement. In its engagement with local and struggling contexts, subverting the conventional suburban classroom spaces and hierarchies of knowledge alike, it opens itself up for the ongoing transformation of both theology and the theological curriculum as well as for the transformation of local communities. It presents the possibility of doing theology at a public university in a way that could have direct and hopefully liberating and life-giving impact in a deeply unequal society, mediating multiple households of freedom.

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