

# Old Testament Studies at the University of Pretoria: Glimpses of the past and future

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## ■ Short historical overview

The two departments of OTS in the different Faculties of Theology at the UP (Sections A and B – from 1917 to 1999) and the one combined Department of OTS (since 2000) have respected academic histories.<sup>13</sup> OTS had been part of the Faculty since its inception (Rautenbach 1960:168). In 1917 OTS was lectured by A.C. Paterson (1917–1923) who was situated in the Faculty of Humanities and who had the initial commission to lecture the Hebrew Language and OTS in the FT (Rautenbach 1960:168).

Two features have characterised OTS between 1917 and 2017. Firstly, its strong relationship with Semitic Languages, and secondly, the privilege that the subject was executed by two separate departments of the faculty, namely the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa (NRCA) between 1917 and 1999 (then called Section A) and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) between 1938 and 1999 (then called Section B).

Pioneer B. Gemser (1926–1955), E. Mulder (1956–1970) and A. van Selms (1938–1962) not only affirmed OTS close relationship with the Semitic Languages and the religious world of the Ancient Near East, but also its embeddedness in a strong international and intellectual academic tradition of the time (Oberholzer 1992:68; Spies & Heydenrych 1987:110–116). As first professor in the department (Section B), J. Kritzinger's approach to OTS was theologically conservative, probably because the academic relationships with the Netherlands and Germany had shaped OTS and scholars' local profile in this early period (Spies & Heydenrych 1987:123–125).

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13. It is not the intention to portray a complete history here. Such portrayals have been done already (see Breytenbach 1996:125–127; Breytenbach and Le Roux 2002:120–122; Le Roux 2009:1–9, 2013:196–224; Oberholzer, Breytenbach & Venter 1992:57–136; Prinsloo 1996:142–143).

During the middle part of the previous century, Afrikaans Bible translations dominated the academic responsibilities of the influential J.P. Oberholzer (1971–1992) and A.H. van Zyl (1966–1986). Both academics participated in projects of the Bible Society of South Africa, especially in the 1953 and 1983 Afrikaans Bible translations. Oberholzer was further engaged in the Afrikaans Bible translation for the deaf, *Die Afrikaanse Bybel vir Dowes* (Oberholzer 2008) and the Bible for All (*Die Bybel vir Alma*).<sup>14</sup> Successors of both these academics continued with this Bible translation tradition. In the department (Section A) both A.P.B. Breytenbach and P.M. Venter pursued Bible translation projects (Breytenbach 1996:125–127). The former, who specialised in Pentateuch Studies and Second Temple literature, completed the isiNdebele Bible translation as project leader (2012).<sup>15</sup> Venter, whose research interests are OT wisdom and apocalyptic literature and OT canon studies, also participated in the Afrikaans BDV translation (*Die Bybel, 'n Direkte Vertaling*).<sup>16</sup>

In the OT department (Section B) W.S. Prinsloo (1975–1997) internationalised OTS during a time of isolation with his Psalms studies. Prinsloo and J.H. Le Roux (1987–2009) became the opposite proponents of academic discussions between text immanent and diachronic exegesis in SA (Prinsloo 1996:142–143). After this period of synchronic-diachronic debates, the rise of both Pentateuch (Pro Pent) and Psalms (Pro Psalms) seminars strengthened the position of the department internationally (Le Roux 2012:1–10)<sup>17</sup>. Le Roux (see Le Roux & Otto 2007) enhanced the international profile of Pentateuch studies while

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14. See <https://www.bible.com/versions/2-aba-bybel-vir-almal>

15. See <https://www.bible.com/versions/450-snd12-isindebele-2012-translation>

16. See <https://www.bybeldirektevertaling.co.za>

17. See also <https://up-za.academia.edu/JurieLeRoux>

D.J. Human contributed to the internationalisation of Psalms studies. Since 2000 Human was the programme manager for Biblical and Religious Studies, which in 2006 became known as Religion Studies (Van der Watt 2002; Human 2002:114–116).

From 2000 the two separate departments were merged into one department with A.P.B. Breytenbach (Head of Department), P.M. Venter, J.H. Le Roux and D.J. Human as academic staff. Apart from the engagement in Bible translation, their academic activities include several other OT foci in the OT syllabus (Breytenbach & Le Roux 2002:212–122).

Between 2001 and 2017 the academic strength of the department was underscored by the establishment of a series of academic projects, which include the following:

- The Pro Pent (Project for the study of the Pentateuch) seminar originated in 2001 under the auspices of J.H. Le Roux and E. Otto (Munich). Since then this annual seminar has gained international recognition and has been held in Pretoria, Munich, Vienna and Stellenbosch. As successor of Le Roux and Pentateuch specialist E.E. (Sias) Meyer has become the young newcomer to the formidable Pro Pent organising team.
- The Pro Psalms (Project Psalms) seminar started in 2003 with D.J. Human as guardian. This annual seminar has taken place in Pretoria, Munich, Vienna and Stellenbosch.
- The Pro Prof (Project Prophets) seminar started in 2013 with A Groenewald as academic driver and initiator.
- In Qumran studies an international seminar started in 2015 with the appointment of A. Geyser-Fouché as specialist in Second Temple and apocalyptic literature.

The department sets a high priority on international interaction, African involvement and the inter- and transdisciplinary character of its academic projects. Projects on African Hermeneutics and the relation of the OT to ancient Near East literature receive special focus in the OTS teaching activities. International conferences held on the themes of suffering (2009), poverty (2014–2015),

land issues (2016) and (in)justice (2017) have underscored the academic intention of the department to be contextually relevant in Africa. A.P.B. Breytenbach, P.M. Venter, D.J. Human and E.E. Meyer participate in the BDV Bible translation.

Current permanent staff members are D.J. Human (Head of Department), A. Groenewald, E.E. Meyer, A. Geysler-Fouché and G.E. de Villiers. S.S. Ndogo is a part-time extraordinary lecturer. Honorary members who have been appointed are E. Otto (Munich) and J.A. Loader (Vienna). Extraordinary professors are T. Römer (Paris, Lausanne), U. Berges (Bonn), C. Frevel (Bochum), A. Mojola (Limuru). Several national and international research associates and post-doctoral fellows have been active in the Department during the past decade. Honorary doctorates were conferred on J.P. Oberholzer and A.H. van Zyl in the previous century and later to E. Otto in 2007 and W.A.M. Beuken (in 2016).

## ■ Old Testament – A pearl to be treasured

Texts of the OT and Hebrew Scriptures rank amongst the world literature of all times. This corpus of texts is not only captured in the canons of the Jewish and Christian faith communities, but it also shares traditions with the Muslim faith and traditions beyond theology and faith. Its texts mirror a diverse and often contradictory picture and sometimes fluctuate between opposite and binary theological positions. No wonder that the history of the reception of the OT is showcasing that this library or parts of it was often overemphasised or rejected (Hasel 1972:15–34, 145–165). It is impossible to sketch a comprehensive picture of OTS and its subsequent subdisciplines. It may rather be appropriate to render a few preliminary perspectives on the importance and beauty of its nature, to emphasise the imperative of dialogue and interrelationship with other theological and non-theological disciplines, and to envisage

a few dreams of this department's future vistas in this regard (Hartenstein 2012):

Theology as a science shows an integrated and a multi-faceted character. This character is built by the perspectives of its different subject disciplines in their interconnectedness and in their relationship with Theology as a whole and in their relationship with the sciences beyond Theology. Despite a relative autonomy of every theological sub-discipline, there is a mutual obligation, shared by every discipline, to build the *Sache* of Theology – a process that is always incomplete and underway. (p. 6)

This pertains to OT scholarship too. In order to contribute to this mutual obligation among disciplines, and to be sensitive to the combined importance and responsibility of all theological subdisciplines this chapter outlines selected perspectives on the nature, challenges and contribution of OT scholarship, before it delineates a short futuristic dream and academic ideals of this department.<sup>18</sup>

No other book has captured the imagination and has influenced religion and culture of the Western world more than the OT (Levin 2010:7-8). Although you do not read this library of books from beginning to end like a novel, it offers striking and fascinating literature such as the narratives on creation, stories on the life and fate of the Israelite patriarchs, social ethics, thrilling narratives on Saul, David and other kings, the painful afflictions of Job, distressful cries of hopelessness (laments), hymns and the exuberant joy of the Psalms, the wisdom and life-giving principles of Proverbs, a pessimistic world view of Qohelet, erotic descriptions of Songs, or admonitions and visionary perspectives of the prophets. Despite the language barriers, or the cultural and time abyss between the ancient 'then' and the current 'now', the OT provides a mirror for contemporary readers to recognise their own doubt or joy, anguish and pain, brokenness, frailty, vengeance or forgiveness, relief, hope or thankfulness, and many more (Levin 2010:9).

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18. See Faculty website: <http://www.up.ac.za/old-testament-studies>

OT texts articulate both functions of comfort and admonishment in applicable contexts which either challenge or convince contemporary readers to make 'wise' decisions in modern life situations. These texts narrate ancient, experienced realities, and bear the potential to mediate valued life realities and cherishing religious experiences (Becker 2005:1). In this sense the OT is a pearl to be treasured. OT scholarship is thus privileged to unravel and facilitate the understanding possibilities of these texts in all their various facets and with all possible scientific means. This scholarship is further confronted with hermeneutical challenges of past and present normativity, contextual ethics, and the processes of interpretation and reinterpretation. This is a task performed in dialogue and in cooperation with other theological and non-theological disciplines.

The scholarship and nature of OTS is diverse but coherent. Its content becomes evident in a variety of smaller sub-disciplines or study fields (Exegesis, Hermeneutics, Theologies, History of Religion, Ethics, Biblical Archaeology, Iconography etc.). Although every subfield has a specific aim and task, these fields do not operate independently but converge and complement one another. The exposition, analysis and contemplation of OT texts (and contemporaneous artefacts) as faith witnesses of the Yahweh religion are multiple tasks.

Reflections on the history of the literature of the OT (*Literaturgeschichte*) made OT scholars aware of the challenges they would face in the future. An awareness of these challenges amongst scholars of other theological disciplines built mutual understanding and cohesion in their distinct endeavours to build the *Sache* of Theology as an interdisciplinary theological enterprise. Schmid (2008, 2011:244–262) identified the following contentious issues, namely: scribal activities and schools in Israel; the role of non-canonical, early Israelite and Jewish literature; oral and written form of texts; periodising the OT history of literature; methodological problems regarding historical arrangement of texts; inner-biblical discussions; and the relationship between histories of literature and the canons.

OT scholars of the department are thus challenged to address the above challenges with enthusiasm in order to build OT scholarship in the next century. Scholarship on the sub-disciplines of OT Theology, Israelite History of Religion, and OT Hebrew Ethics will continue to be relevant, while the important role of Biblical Archaeology, ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the social history of Israel will remain part of the spheres of OT contemplation.

## ■ Old Testament studies – A way forward

In the past century, OTS at the UP has shown a respectful academic history, especially with regard to Bible translation and selected fields of biblical exegesis. A tradition has been built on the study of the Pentateuch, Psalms, Prophets and Second Temple Literature. In close cooperation with the Department of Semitic Languages (currently Ancient Languages) in the Faculty of Humanities, OTS has built a national and international academic reputation. This FT is a multi-church faculty in Africa and provides, with other departments, theological and religious training to ministers of religions, pastors, theologians and those interested in religion.<sup>19</sup>

The Department formulates its academic vision as follows:

[7]o present 'excellent education' in Old Testament Studies; to conduct 'world recognised research' on selected Old Testament study fields; to deliver 'meaningful service' in the community and to pursue ongoing 'staff development and specialisation'. In pursuing this vision the department has committed itself to the mission of *innovative and excellent enquiry-led teaching and learning* for under- and postgraduates; quality research by personnel; promoting a relevant and structured research culture for postgraduate students and research fellows; increasing its international profile and involvement, especially in Africa; and constructive community involvement in broader communities on local and national level.<sup>20</sup> (n.p.)

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19. From 2018 this faculty at UP will be known as the Faculty of Theology and Religion.

20. See Faculty website: <http://www.up.ac.za/old-testament-studies>



The intention in the department is to promote ongoing personal and academic development of staff and to create a working environment which stimulates creativity and a happy workforce.

OTS is aligned with the dreams and academic ideals of the FT at the UP, especially with the institution's 2025 vision. The department was subjected in 2013 to an external, national and international audit of which the outcome suggested refinements to its curricula, teaching and learning as well as research aims. Since the #must-fall movement in SA in 2016, the challenges regarding social context, language, transformation and institutional culture have come to the foreground. During this year of centenary celebrations (2017), the department has committed itself again to address the challenges of the current contextual and institutional contexts in SA.

Both the personnel and continuing projects of OTS will contribute to address the academic and social challenges in future. Academic projects like the Pro Pent, Pro Psalms, Pro Prof and Qumran seminars, the African Contextual Hermeneutics meetings,<sup>21</sup> and other academic activities<sup>22</sup> are essential contributors to an OTS Department located in Africa in the next century. Furthermore, the department contributes to the *Faculty Research Theme*, entitled 'Ecodomy' (Life in its

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21. This forum was established in 2012 and serves as discussion platform or academic incubator for OT scholars or those interested in gender issues to stimulate research on the use, interpretation and application of OT texts in contextual situations.

22. International video conferences: These annual conferences have been held the past seven years between the Universities of Pretoria and Essen-Duisburg, Dortmund and Bochum (Germany). This e-learning instrument stimulates undergraduate teaching and international contact between undergraduate students. It further serves as assessment measurement to evaluate the standard of undergraduate courses. Postgraduate seminars, colloquia: Postgraduate seminars and colloquia are arranged quarterly, when postgraduate students and research associates present their research projects in smaller discussion groups.

fullness) or well-being of society.<sup>23</sup> By doing this OTS strives to keep the OT and Hebrew Scriptures vibrant and relevant for the African context(s). A better understanding of these ancient texts should enhance the faith or religious experience of its readers.

## ■ Transformation and the future

In agreement with the UP 2025 institutional vision, OTS is committed to the value of diversity and transformation in its various forms and interpretations. In the past, until 1994, the study of the OT was almost exclusively a white male dominated enterprise. Snyman (2013:2) indicates that epistemological transformation is evident in two aspects of the study of the OT in SA since the last two decades of the previous century, '[t]he first epistemological transformation (was) from a predominantly conservative approach to the study of the Old Testament to critical scholarship' and 'a kind of second epistemological transformation' was a 'remarkable diversity of approaches' and an increase in 'race and gender representation' from 1994 until 2012.

The urgency to take the African context(s) more into consideration and to address questions from the African continent more seriously requires serious attention. This entails sensitivity for the multi-African social contexts. Without neglecting existing paradigms new epistemological knowledge systems should be added to the academic system. This includes inter alia more indigenous knowledge systems. Such systems will enrich the study of the OT and add value to theological and religious education. Further transformational aspects to be addressed are pedagogy and the openness to critical thinking.

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23. Two books on this theme have been published with contributions by OT personnel and associates. See Human (2015) and Human (2017).

The department is committed to explore and pursue all possibilities to develop the aspects of Africanisation, diversity and transformation as academic values on different levels. In 2012 the first woman in the history of the department was appointed as a permanent staff member (A. Geysler-Fouché). The second woman appointment was G.E. de Villiers in 2015. An appointment after 2013 was S.S. Ndogo as honorary senior lecturer. The number of black undergraduate and postgraduate students has increased during the past two years. But, academia and church are both in dire need for more African academics who can teach biblical and OTS with the knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic or other Semitic languages.

The academic profiles and activities of departmental personnel build the avenues for future contextual academic scholarship. Their strengths and academic development are incubators for the academic stature of the department in the century to come. Without providing their complete academic profiles, glimpses of the staff members' current research interests, inclinations and contributions open up the gates to some futuristic vistas. They are presented in the following outlines of the Pentateuch, Prophets and Writings, with additional ancient Near Eastern themes and Religion Studies

## ■ Pentateuch

### ■ E.E. (Sias) Meyer

E.E. (Sias) Meyer was appointed in 2010. He wrote a thesis on the Priestly Code and aspects of the book of Leviticus. Meyer, thus, as the successor of J.H. Le Roux is the Pentateuch specialist in the faculty (Le Roux 2013:217–218) and will specialise in this part of the Hebrew canon in future.

Until the 1990s the South African OT scenario was dominated by text-imminent methods. This tendency is described in the book of J.H. Le Roux (1993) with the apt title of *A Story of Two Ways*.

The two ways to which Le Roux refers are the text-imminent and the historical-critical methods. The latter was less used. As Le Roux (1993:352) states in the conclusion of his book 'historical criticism has clearly not been accepted or digested by the South African theological establishment'. The question today is: What has happened since the early nineties and where should South African OT criticism, especially the study of the Pentateuch, be going in the next few decades? Meyer will address this question continuously.

Meyer underscores that specific future foci will include three possible areas of growth and contestation. These are firstly, the challenge by some South African OT critics that some other scholars have become too focused on Historical Criticism and need to focus more on contemporary issues. Secondly, in response to this challenge, the OT in general and the Pentateuch, in particular, have the potential in helping readers to engage with ethical issues. Thirdly, the study of the Pentateuch reminds us that religious texts are not innocent, but that they were created in ancient historical contexts and served ancient agendas. Therefore we need to continue reading them critically.

In 2012 M. Masenya and H. Ramantswana (2012:604) challenged OT scholars that 'the historical critical trajectory appears to have captured the hearts of SA OT scholars'. This claim was based on an assessment of articles published in *Old Testament Essays* between 1994 and 2010. Masenya and Ramantswana drew from an earlier challenge of F.E. Deist (1992) to other OT scholars to create 'an indigenous South African tradition of OT scholarship' (Deist 1992:314-315). The main question was whether it is enough to engage with the text of the OT within the historical context of ancient Israel or should scholars today rather allow this ancient text to interact with the contemporary world. In this context one is reminded of the classical distinction made by Stendahl (1962:422) between what a text 'meant' and what it 'means'. For Masenya and Ramantswana South African OT scholarship is somehow stuck with what a text 'meant' and they would like these scholars

to engage more with what the text 'means'. At least, this criticism by both these OT scholars shows that South African scholarship has started to take historical criticism seriously, although they think that it is not enough. Their challenge should be taken seriously. But it does not seem clear. The question is: How do we venture from the ancient text to our modern-day world in the hope that the text might somehow change our world today?

One challenge today entails that we might read biblical texts to serve our modern-day political agendas, even if these agendas are good and just. These kinds of readings are often characterised by inconsistent methodologies. This inconsistency is, for instance, visible in the work of E. Farisani. Although Farisani (2010:515) usually warns 'against an uncritical reading of a text', and heeds this warning in his engagements with texts such as Ezra-Nehemiah, his reading of 1 Kings 21:1-29 is actually very uncritical and does not ask any critical questions about the agendas of the authors (see Farisani 2005; also Meyer 2015). Despite this pitfall a renewed debate on the use of the OT in modern-day ethics is needed, especially in Africa. Whatever we do in an attempt to engage with contemporary issues, the challenge is to be consistent. The question remains how we should address the challenge posed by Masenya and Ramantswana.

A possible way to explore the question is to ask about the ethics of the OT and especially those in the Pentateuch. Many of the legal codes in the Pentateuch, such as the Decalogue or the Deuteronomic and Holiness Codes show clear ethical content. Yet, OT critics often see content as a description how ancient Israel thought about ethics, but they are often reluctant to ask more normative questions. A good example of that is the engagement with ethics by John Barton (2014:276) who, only on the last page of his book, turns to the question of applying the 'ethics of the Old Testament' today. He argued that it was not what he intended to do. Barton hopes that, by showing the relevant ancient issues, we might today discover that we share similar issues.

One would think that the Pentateuch could help readers today about the issues of 'land', 'poverty' and 'inequality'. There are laws in the Pentateuch addressing poverty while the larger Pentateuch reflects the story about the promise of land. Themes like 'land' and 'poverty' obviously resonate with the African and South African context(s) and their challenges. Yet, many scholars have shown that there are different views on land in the OT. Habel (1995) has shown this in his book where he identifies at least six ideologies of land. How does this help us if the OT does not agree on the relationship between land and identity? Just as we cannot agree on the meaning of land today, neither could the ancient authors of the OT.

Habel's (1995:31) first ideology is that of the king owning all the land. But this ideology is absent from the Pentateuch and only found in certain Psalms like Psalms 2 and 72. Why did the ideology of the king owning all the land not make it into the Pentateuch? Furthermore, why are the legal collections of the Pentateuch not attributed to the king as in most other societies of the ancient Near East?<sup>24</sup> It seems that, like many modern-day constitutional democracies (our own included), the ancient authors of the Bible already understood that the power of human authority figures should be curtailed and limited. The critical study of the Pentateuch would help the reader to understand how ancient authors thought about power and the abuse of power. However, there is also another side which has to do with the influence of empire on the OT and the Pentateuch. How to relate these questions to today remains the challenge of our current hermeneutical reflections on the texts.

One of the issues in OT criticism is: Why is the OT so positive about the Persian Empire? The Assyrians and Babylonians are criticised and despised, but the Persians are portrayed in a positive light. One obvious answer is usually that they presumably

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24. Quite a few scholars have asked this question. A recent example would be Tsai (2014:170-175).

funded the Second Temple, which was in the time of Darius, more or less 515 BCE (Frevel 2016:309). The Holiness Code has ethical content as was previously mentioned, and one could add that, like the first part of Leviticus, it still portrays the cult as central. Many scholars argue that this text was written in the Persian Period<sup>25</sup> and this leads to an essential question: Is the Holiness Code pro Persian Empire or critical of the empire?<sup>26</sup> Is it thus embracing the empire or somehow resisting it? Similar political and ideological questions should be asked in OTS today and in the future.

Hieke (2014b:679–687), for instance, in his interpretation of the Molech laws in Leviticus 18 and 20, offers what one could call ‘an anti-imperial reading’, where these texts warn people living in Yehud against allowing their children to serve the Persian king. ‘Molech’ is understood as a coded reference to ‘king’ which in this context would mean Persian king. The text becomes some kind of a coded encouragement to resist the Persian Empire.

Balentine (1999:39–57) on the other hand offers a different interpretation. He presents a broad overview of how ancient empires worked, including the ‘social control’ they had used to keep conquered nations subdued. He then presents an interpretation of the priestly creation narrative (Gn 1) which concludes with the creation of Sabbath. For Balentine (1999:49), what we have is ‘a symbolic picture of a world where religion and the priestly cult is preordained by God as the highest purpose of creation’. Endorsing the cult means for Balentine endorsing the empire that built it.

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25. See Otto (2007:199–200) for the early fourth century, Nihan (2007:574) for late fifth century with Grünwaldt (1999:379–381) and Hieke (2014a:70) aiming more for the middle of the fifth century.

26. I am familiar with the debate started by Peter Frei and his hypothesis of Persian Imperial Authorization as well as the arguments of the Heidelberg School. I do not find their arguments that convincing and would rather agree with Ska (2006:217–226) that the Pentateuch was created as the result of the internal need for unity and not external Persian pressure.

Whichever way we read the Pentateuch, it constantly reminds us that religious texts like the Bible are not innocent texts, but that they were created in real historical contexts where powerplay and political agendas were of the order of the day. In this sense, they have real potential to resonate with modern-day African or South African politics. Hopefully, these texts and such interpretations inspire readers to be more critical and strive for greater ethical values and not simply serve contemporary political agendas. Yet, like the ancient authors of the Pentateuch debated issues of ethics, poverty, land and identity, we should follow their example to keep on debating these issues in contemporary African and South African societies. They endorse a way that contemporary readers could follow.

With the above challenges and questions Meyer will appropriate and contextualise the Pentateuch to students of OTS in years to come.

## ■ Prophets

### ■ Alphonso Groenewald

Alphonso Groenewald was appointed permanently in the Department in 2006. Although he initially specialised on the Book of Psalms, he also focused his career further on Prophetic studies. He convincingly combined and intertwined both synchronic and diachronic exegesis in his methodological approach to exegesis and texts (Le Roux 2013:213–214). Since then he has lectured in Biblical and Religious Studies, Religion Studies and OTS. He has been responsible for teaching all the Prophetic Literature since 2011. His main focus of research has been the book of Isaiah (mainly Is 1–12) since 2010.

Groenewald completed his DTh (2003) at the University of Nijmegen (Netherlands), entitled 'Psalm 69: Its structure, redaction and composition', which was published in 2003. He obtained a Master's degree in Semitic Languages from the



UP (1996) with a dissertation entitled ‘Poetic conventions in a Young Babylonian prayer of the lifting of the hand to the goddess’ *Ištar*. His conclusion contributed to the view that a serious shortcoming in the analysis of Akkadian texts is the lack of attention paid to a detailed literary analysis of such texts. This shortcoming is especially discernible in the case of poetic texts. It is widely accepted that poetic texts contain a great number of specialised techniques which play an important role in their interpretation. His comprehensive poetic analysis of this Babylonian prayer made it clear that this text is an artistically composed prayer and that this poet was an artist in his own merit who contributed to the poetic literature of the Ancient Near East.

In his doctoral thesis Groenewald concluded that the text of Psalm 69 ‘is the product of a multi-stage redactional-compositional process’ (Groenewald 2003:291). Le Roux (2009:5) emphasised that Groenewald reaffirms the structural analysis (of his Pretoria teacher W.S. Prinsloo) as the basic exegetical approach but also underscored the importance of the diachronical aspects of a text (cf. also Groenewald 2004:62–72). In this regard he follows the methodology of Ulrich Berges, his teacher in Nijmegen, who calls this approach a ‘diachronically reflected synchrony’ (Berges 1999:119–120, 2000:170). The specific nature of the OT requires the exegete to focus on more than only the final text of the individual psalm, or for that matter, any other OT text. The OT, as an ancient book, was written over a very long time and went through processes of reworking and revision from different perspectives in different contexts and in different epochs. This complex origin and growth of the texts of the OT is part of its attraction: One can ‘even assert that the power of the Old Testament literature actually lies in this long, involved process’ (Groenewald 2007:108; Le Roux 2009:5).

Any analysis of OT texts should take the historical dimension of the OT seriously (Le Roux 2009:5). Literature of the Hebrew Bible is compared with a cathedral which was planned and built over decades and centuries. Therefore it reflects the building styles from different epochs and often shows no sign of unity or style. In order to comprehend the structure of a cathedral, one has to dig into the history of its origins. The 'layers' of the OT were put together like building blocks over many years. These layers highlight the OT's long development, as well as the particular theological thinking of a specific period in Israel's existence (Le Roux 2009:5; cf. also Groenewald 2007:109). In years to come, students of OTS should still unravel these processes in their studies and research.

His research focus on prophetic literature reflects a twofold emphasis, namely the focus on the literary as well as the historical nature of these texts. Both the synchronic and the diachronic analysis indicate the development of the text of Isaiah 1-12 in different layers. It is thus necessary to take the historical embeddedness of the message of the book of Isaiah seriously, as it is the product of a long and complicated process of development and transmission. Texts are indeed rooted in human history and cannot be properly understood apart from their historical rootedness. The relationship between the synchronic and the diachronic analysis is of a subtle nature and both dimensions should be retained (cf. Groenewald 2009, 2011b, 2013a, 2013b).

Although Isaiah 1-12 is presented to the reader as a single literary unit at the opening of the book of Isaiah, an analysis of these chapters shows that they are a composition written and composed through several centuries of Judahite history. A key focus of Groenewald's exegesis is the exploration of the ways in which these texts link with other texts within the canon, specifically with texts in the Pentateuch. Literary studies have highlighted the way all texts dialogue with and reuse parts of other texts: whether they agree with or oppose those other texts. One can thus say: No text is an island. In OT scholarship

it has often been the tendency to focus only on one book or a group of books as if they existed in isolation from one another as separate worlds. This statement would imply that each one of these different books was written and composed amongst isolated social and literary groups. It, though, is impossible to imagine that the different scribal groups in the post-exilic province of *Yehud* functioned and worked in totally isolated compartments. There were only a few highly educated scribes in post-exilic Jerusalem and despite their differences, they shared a social discourse which was reflected in their literary creations. This assumption does not imply flattening the differences in theologies and ideologies existing between these groups or even within the different books they created. On the contrary, these literary creations are reflections of robust discourses existing between these different groups in different epochs of history and understandably contain multiple ideologies and voices (cf. Groenewald 2011a, 2012). More of these inner-biblical discourses will have to be identified, contemplated and appropriated for the African and South African contexts in future.

As was stated above, Groenewald established a project with the focus on Prophetic studies (Pro Prof). Since 2012, an annual seminar focusing on topics from the prophetic literature and its relevance to the African and South African context(s) has been organised. The aim is to foster the exegetical tradition this Department has been associated with over the last century and to apply this tradition to the prophetic literature (Le Roux 2009:7).

Recently, Groenewald has engaged with the new field of 'Trauma Theory and Biblical Studies' and its application to the prophetic books, especially the Book of Isaiah (cf. Carr 2011; Garber 2015). Theologians have always engaged with questions of human suffering. This discourse about suffering and God's 'implied' absence is described as the theodicy question. Theodicy engages with claims about the goodness and presence of God during mysterious situations of suffering in the world. The rise of trauma studies and the theological engagement with it can move

theology, in particular, and OTS specifically in new directions. Such perspectives would lead to distinctive theological articulations and present profound challenges to theological understandings (Rambo 2010:5). Biblical scholars make use of trauma theory (Rambo 2010):

[B]oth to make sense of the accounts of violence, suffering and catastrophe within these sacred texts and to give theological expression to contemporary contexts of suffering ... Trauma theory provides a distinctive lens through which to interpret sacred texts and for rethinking the claims and central beliefs arising from them. (p. 30)

At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries OT scholars paid new attention to the experiences of the destruction of Samaria and Israel (late 8th century BCE) and the Babylonian exiles (early 6th century), and the subsequent effects of these two traumatic events on the people of Samaria and Judah (Carr 2014:3). The effect of the Babylonian exile, as well as its aftermath, was the driving force behind the text production and preservation of many of these materials that we have in the Hebrew Bible. The stamp of exile was thus placed on much of this canon.

This insight caused a number of scholars to examine the material in the Hebrew Bible in the light of trauma theory (Garber 2015:24–25). This, according to Carr (2011:304), would explain some of the unique characteristics of Judean scribal prophecy, namely its ‘communal audience and focus on collective guilt as compared with archives of Near Eastern prophecy (e.g. Mari, Neo-Assyrian prophecy) that had not gone through the sieve of exilic trauma’. Trauma studies can therefore be helpful in the study of the Hebrew Bible, as contemporary research on trauma highlights the manner in which overwhelming suffering often has a tremendous effect on memory and behaviour, even in indirect ways. Trauma could thus be defined as ‘an overwhelming, haunting experience of disaster so explosive in its impact that

it cannot be directly encountered and influences an individual/group's behavior and memory in indirect ways' (Carr 2014:7).

Apart from his exegetical approach, various competencies regarding Psalms and Prophetic Literature and his interest in trauma studies, Groenewald will teach and appropriate the different texts to students of Africa in future.

## ■ Old Testament writings

### ■ Ananda Geysler-Fouché

Ananda Geysler-Fouché was appointed in 2012 as successor of P.M. Venter. She obtained a Master's degree in Semitic Languages (2000) on Qumran texts, a PhD degree (2006) on Chronicles and has interest in the Second Temple and OT wisdom literature (Le Roux 2013:218). She studied at the Qumran Institute in Gröningen (the Netherlands) under the guidance of world-renowned Qumran experts F.G. Martínez and E. Tigchelaar. In both her Master's and PhD studies she gained experience in reading Second Temple Literature. This has enabled her to develop a niche for the uniqueness of texts from the Second Temple era as well as from Qumran texts. In pursuing educational studies, she received a postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education in 2008 which has influenced her teaching methodology. For Geysler-Fouché teaching is a process of facilitation where students are involved in their own learning processes with a strong component of research that is implemented through inquiry-based learning.

Geysler-Fouché's lecturing responsibilities are overlapping extensively with her field(s) of research. Her teaching duties include modules on biblical narratives and historiography with emphasis on the books of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Ruth. Other modules include OT wisdom (including books like Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) and apocalyptic literature, like the book of Daniel and overviews on the apocryphal apocalyptic literature, like Enoch, Baruch and Qumran.

Geyser-Fouché has included philosophical concepts from postmodern literary theories in her research. She has applied these literary concepts in her interpretation of both OT and Qumran texts (Geyser & Breytenbach 2006; Geysers-Fouché 2016a). As a result of this she has focused on the type of language that different Judaic texts used in order to convey ideologically driven messages. Furthermore, she attends to the polemic nature of OT and other Judaic texts. She interprets texts critically, which is reflected in her dialectic critical orientated theology. In her research she examined crucifixion texts in Qumran and compared these with OT regulations, asking whether Deuteronomy 21:18-23 is the source or the intertext for the Temple texts (cf. Geysers & Van Aarde 1998; Geysers-Fouché 2014b). In addition, Geysers-Fouché addressed contextual questions asked from the viewpoint of an ecclesial perspective. Two of these questions were the matters of 'heaven and hell' (Geysers-Fouché 2015), and the question about discernment (בִּינָה) in the OT (Geysers-Fouché 2014a).

Part of Geysers-Fouché's research was done on the powers behind Chronicles in comparison with texts in Genesis, Samuel, Kings and a selection of other sources. This was complemented by research on the tendency to idealise David or Moses according to the community's place of worship: powers behind Chronicles in contrast to the powers behind the Qumran community. This is compared to a David against Moses or to the temple cult against the Torah (cf. Geysers & Breytenbach 2006). The latter is one of the topics about which a lot of research can still be done and which will surface in future research. Lately, she engaged in gender-specific studies regarding Qumran texts 4Q184 and 4Q185 (cf. Geysers-Fouché 2016b, 2016c).

Ecotheology is another important research interest of Geysers-Fouché. She links this theology with the created order as reflected in wisdom literature. Furthermore, she endeavours to understand the human being's ecological responsibility from an evolutionary perspective, with special emphasis on order and creation theology from OT wisdom literature. There is an

attempt by her to draw a connection between these entities. This research entails an exposition of various aspects, namely, cosmology, ecology, evolutionary biology and order in the wisdom literature.

In summary, Geysers-Fouché's research themes focus on texts from the second Temple Judaism, which include: wisdom literature, narratives, apocalyptic literature and Qumran Studies. In the past, Qumran Studies did not receive much attention in SA. Geysers-Fouché initiated and conducted several activities in this regard. These include a national conference on Qumran Studies at the UP (2015), an issue with high standard publications (2016) and participation at IOSOT, Stellenbosch (2016). Geysers-Fouché cooperates with a local research associate, A. Viljoen, and two internationally renowned Qumran scholars, namely E. Tigchelaar from KU Leuven, Belgium and (the late) P. Flint from TWU, Canada.

The Department of OTS currently hosts a registered project on Qumran Studies. This project contributes to a special niche for Qumran Studies in Africa (which is a scarcity in SA). Research questions on various aspects are inter alia addressed in dialogue with other national and international Qumran scholars annually. As part of the Faculty of Theology's centenary celebrations (2017), the Department organises and hosted the national Old Testament Society of South Africa (OTSSA) conference (05–07 September). In 2017 the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls is celebrating its 70th anniversary.

Texts from the Second Temple period cannot be studied in isolation. Results from this project are stimulating interdisciplinary cooperation. This includes inter alia postmodern literary theories, cosmology, ecology, evolutionary biology, ecotheology, NTS, Talmudic and Apocryphal studies, et cetera.

In future, the academic challenge would be to read and interpret these themes and textual studies within the context(s) of the African and South African societies. Geysers-Fouché will play a major role in this endeavour.

## ■ Dirk J. Human

Dirk Human is since September 2012 the Head of Department and the longest serving academic personnel member in the FT (25 years). Aspects of his academic profile are already described elsewhere (see inter alia Le Roux 2009, 2013:210–212).<sup>27</sup> Therefore a complete academic profile of him is not necessary here.

Human's primary research focus is on the book of Psalms. His supervisor, W.S. Prinsloo, has left a legacy of national and international renowned Psalm research in the Department (see Prinsloo 2000). This focus has also inspired the research fields of other Prinsloo students in the Department of Ancient Languages at the UP, namely Phil Botha, Gert T.M. Prinsloo and Henk Potgieter.

Apart from his individual Psalm projects he has initiated and established an international Pro Psalms seminar, where national and international Psalms specialists have discussed relevant themes annually since 2003. In the past few years various themes have been discussed, such as Psalms and suffering (2009), Psalms and their redactions (2012), Psalms and the poor (2015–2016), Psalms and (in)justice (2017). Several academic books have appeared during the past 14 years as a result of this seminar. They include: *Psalms and Liturgy* (Human & Vos 2004), *Psalms and Mythology* (Human 2007), *Psalms and Hebrews, Studies in Reception* (Human & Steyn 2010), *Psalms and Poetry in Old Testament Ethics* (2012). The themes of suffering, land issues and poverty are relevant for the African and South African contexts and will be discussed for a long time to come.

Various themes in the book of Psalms have an ongoing relevance for the future and for emerging researchers. Together with other poetical books of the Hebrew Scriptures the teaching and theologising of these themes and subject will remain vivid in the next century.

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27. See <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0346-4209>



## ■ Ancient near eastern themes and religion studies

### ■ Gerda E. de Villiers

Gerda de Villiers is the second woman to be appointed in the Department in 2015. Her teaching responsibilities are grounded in the Faculty's programme for Religion Studies, where her expertise on Ancient Near Eastern religions comes to the fore.

De Villiers<sup>28</sup> completed her DLitt thesis in Semitic Languages at the UP entitled 'Understanding Gilgamesh: his life and his story' (De Villiers 2004). She was linguistically equipped to read the Gilgamesh Epic in its original language, Akkadian. In the first part of her thesis she attempts to uncover the legendary king Bilgames/Gilgamesh, who inspired the Epic, and to trace the origins and development of the Epic from its Sumerian roots to the Standard Babylonian Version. Thereafter she analysed the Epic by means of the contemporary literary theory of Gerard Genette. De Villiers concluded that the Gilgamesh Epic is experiencing a recent survival in current African contexts because it is able to enter the experiences of modern readers, namely a search for the meaning of life. According to the Epic, the meaning of life is to be found in life itself, and what the individual makes of it (De Villiers & Prinsloo 2004:165–181).

In 2016 De Villiers completed a PhD thesis in OTS on the book of Ruth, 'Israel se Identiteit en die Boek Rut' (De Villiers 2016a). She analysed this book by means of a historical critical approach, which is to read the narrative against a particular socio-historical period in Israelite history. De Villiers concurs with those scholars who date the book to the Second Temple period of the Israelite history. She has indicated that one of the main problems of the post-exilic Israelite community was the question of identity: Who was 'Israel'? Mosaic laws and books like Ezra and Nehemiah argue that foreigners (like the Moabites) be excluded; the book of Ruth

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28. A word of gratitude to De Villiers for this part of the chapter.

offers a sweet yet powerful contra-argument for the inclusion of foreigners in the YHWH-worshipping community. De Villiers concludes that the book of Ruth may thus be employed to address contemporary issues where Scripture does not give clear answers, like for example the debate regarding homosexual relationships and marriages (see De Villiers & Le Roux 2016).

De Villiers lectures in the Religion Studies where she introduces students to ancient myths and ancient religions. Initially the focus was on the world of the Ancient Near East: the myths and religions from Mesopotamia, Egypt and Greece. However, there appear to be more students who adhere to religions other than Christianity, or who do not have an interest in the Bible as such. Therefore De Villiers is currently including religions from the worlds of fire and ice: Meso-American and Norse religions, in the syllabus.

Gerda de Villiers thus focuses on two areas of study: Israel and the Hebrew Bible, as well as the surrounding world of Israel, namely the Ancient Near East. She especially attempts to discover the ways in which some of these pagan myths were not merely taken over but reinterpreted by the authors of the Hebrew Bible within Israel's unique YHWH-theology (De Villiers 2006:26-34, 2016b:45-57). Now and in the future, she will continuously aim to raise an awareness of the dialogue between Israel and its ancient Near Eastern neighbours, and also to command respect for all religions, ancient as well as modern. In this way, she and the Department play an invaluable role to build religious tolerance on campus, in SA and on the African continent.

## ■ Africanisation and decolonisation

### ■ Sampson S. Ndogo

It has repeatedly been stated that the Department should constantly reinterpret and adapt its academic position in the African and South African contexts. Africa is different from other

continents and asks different questions (Le Roux 2013:198). In this regard, Sampson Ndogo, honorary senior lecturer in the Department, contributes hugely to the verbalisation of an understanding of Africanisation and decolonisation. He articulates the following.

The call for Afrocentric readings of the OT is a response to the historical hegemonic hold of Euro-American scholars on biblical studies. The Africanisation of biblical interpretation came to the fore initially as a missiological exercise, as Drogers (1977:43) correctly observes, prompted by the need to contextualise texts for precritical audiences. Admittedly, the process proved condescending as a construct of Euro-American thought whose dualism did not allow Westerners to fully appreciate the indivisibility of the spiritual and material world view of the African (cf. Kaunda 2015:74; Ngong 2009:1). The exclusion of Africans in the attempt to Africanise the interpretation of biblical texts naively produced readings latent with a Western world view. When African scholars progressively became active participants, their theological perspective was endemically dependent on the foreign discourse as studies reveal.

After the missionary era, Africanisation of OT texts took a different turn with the advent of critical African scholars. To start with, the quest for an authentically African Christianity seemed elusive given the colonial context in which such attempts were purely theomimicry (see Voshikawa et al. 2017; Boik & Gremmea 2016; Chayaamor & Hannachi-Belkadi 2017). Early African theologians were not viewed as independent thinkers but participated in the theological discourse under the supervision of Euro-American missionaries or attended Western institutions (see Rankin 2003:85–100). As a result Adamo (2007:21), for example, describes himself as a product of theological training that was contextually and scholarly non-African in which European manners were inculcated, alien values promoted while local cultural values were either dismissed or demonised.

The non-African context was exacerbated by the seeming coincidence of the missionaries and colonialists. Both the

missionary proselytising effort and the imperial agenda introduced the language, culture and systems that were viewed collectively as civilisation. In the process, although missionary endeavours cannot be wholly demonised as Paustian (2014:1-25) attempts to argue, the damage to the psyche of the African identity is incontestable. Kaunda (2015:74) goes to great length to describe the dislocation and alienation of the African in ways that paralysed their way of knowing and a sense of place in the world.

In speaking about the displacement of local ideals, Dube (1999:34) espouses that in speaking foreign languages Africans were not only exposed to grasping syntax and morphology but assuming a culture which carried a body of values. This is reflected in Holter's (2002) listing of doctoral dissertations in OT by African students from 1967 to 2000 which reveals among other observations that the fetters of Western exegesis held strong. In a review of this publication, Bediako (2004) comments on the dissertations that:

[N]one shows serious use of the African context as a resource for interpretation or indicates that the African world, with its awareness of transcendence that is 'larger' than what the Western Enlightenment outlook allows for, can illuminate the Old Testament, probably because most dissertations were produced at Western institutions. (p. 138)

However, critical African scholarship, taking a cue from political emancipation, grew in confidence and took on the brand of theology clothed in Western attire, as Gathogo (2008:162) writes that 'by loosening the missionary interpretive control of the Bible some African Christians adopted new hermeneutical technique to exegete the biblical texts within their own notion of authenticity'. Maluleke (2000:195) predicted the emergence of this new paradigm of the agency of the African in interpreting and enhancing a methodology that would give a better handle on the strategies used to marginalise them. Decolonisation of the Bible represents part of that paradigm as the critical awareness of the connection between texts and the Euro-American

exegetical analyses and the necessary repositioning through a new hermeneutical framework that allows the reclaiming of an authentic African identity and faith. For OTS the process is perhaps twofold.

Firstly, as current scholarship reveals (see Adamo 2007; Dada 2010; Kinyua 2015; Masalha 2012; Punt 2003) decolonisation is by definition a response to colonial readings of OT texts. Punt (2003:58) describes it as a hermeneutic of suspicion and of retrieval or restoration. As such concomitant identity of this reading will necessarily have a reactive notion. Kinyua (2013:58) calls it a discourse of resistance. Ngong (2009:7) labels the readings produced prior to decolonisation as 'imperial texts'. Kinyua (2013:58) calls analyses of Bible translation contributions towards the ultimate discourse of resistance against discourse of colonialism. The decolonising agenda has contemporaries in other contexts (Ahluwalia 2000) and disciplines (Wa Thiong 1998) all advocating for a denunciation of any subjugation motifs. Küster (2014:172) opines the inevitability of a response by stating that Christian intellectuals found themselves needing to face the question of why they wanted to keep the religion of their former colonisers. This turbulent phase is perhaps a necessary development but will culminate into what can authentically be described as an African reading of the OT.

Secondly, African OT readings will perhaps emerge informed by a new hermeneutical framework by African scholars using African realities to interact with the biblical text, not as a reaction to Euro-American readings, but purely in their own right as such. Masenya (2004:455) questions whether it is wise or folly to continue to teach African students Western-oriented readings of OT texts. Teaching such readings at the exclusion of others is certainly folly, but pretending that these readings do not exist as legitimate value-adding intellectual property negates academics. Nyende (2009:132) iterates the need for ethnic studies as urgent and requires appropriateness of curriculum within the African context. As Oden (2007) revealed in his seminal publication on the paradoxical genesis of Western Christian thought via the North

African writing fathers, Tertullian, St Augustine of Hippo, Cyprian, Origen and Athanasius. Sadly, these champions have not always been presented and celebrated as African.

Kaunda (2015:74) highlights an important impediment to an African reading of the biblical text – African self-negations as a result of the dehumanisation of the African identity. He disputes the adequacy of the decolonisation theology as an emancipatory approach when he writes that (Kaunda 2015):

African theology or decolonial thinking did not put into consideration the extent to which Africans had internalized oppression and lost sight of indigenous agency which led to recolonisation of the self by Africans. (p. 75)

He proposes a viable framework for decolonising the African mind through independent thinking.

The task of OTS on hand is by no means easy. There are some implications worth considering:

1. The promotion of African scholars in OTS in order to subscribe to the seemingly limited voices within certain disciplines (see Mangayi 2012).
2. The emergence of African theology whereby the concept 'decolonisation' is no longer necessary as the adjectival qualifier for reading OT texts.
3. The continued publication of collaborative projects by African scholars such as the Africa Bible Commentary (Adeyemo 2006) commensurate with other publications of this nature.
4. When the African identity and voice represents multiple voices across the continent, particularly those at the grass roots, whose views have not always been considered in the reading of the biblical texts.

Ndoga and other African OT scholars will enrich the department in future by contemplating and adding diverse African epistemologies to existing international ways of text interpretation and appropriation. In the next century African voices should resonate clear and with a strong global footprint.

## ■ Résumé

This chapter intends to cast selective glimpses of the past, present and anticipated future of the Department of OTS at the UP. During the centenary celebrations of the FT (2017), this contemplation is imperative. Academic activities and contributions of its personnel, students and associate scholars of the past and present hold a significant influence on its prospective academic stature and future. Their relevance and the contextualisation of OT and Ancient Near Eastern literature in the South African and African contexts could resonate in an influential and clear global footprint. Therefore, the Department will continuously strive for academic excellence at a world-ranked Faculty and University. In alliance with ecclesial partners, society and academic collaborators this Department will work for academic integrity to be locally relevant and internationally competitive in the century to come.

## ■ Summary: Chapter 2

In a short historical overview of the academic and social contributions of the Department of OTS at the UP over the past century (1917–2017), this chapter provides a limited picture of how the department has contributed to academia, church and society. In this year of the Faculty of Theology's centenary celebrations, this chapter contemplates selected highlights of the past and intends to discover the avenues of future vistas through current academic strengths, research foci of personnel and the actualisation of the OT in the African context(s).

From the inception of the UP in 1908, the Faculty of Humanities has been involved in OT related studies, namely the study of the Hebrew language. OTS has become known over many years through individual scholars' expertise regarding Bible translation and the foci on specific parts of the OT, namely the Pentateuch, Psalms, Prophets or Second Temple literature. World renowned projects started since 1990 to involve several international scholars.

These include inter alia Pro Pent, Pro Psalms, Pro Prof and Qumran projects.

Because the department is located at a FT in Africa, it has continuously strived to become theologically relevant for local and African contexts. The department continually envisions excellence and relevant scholarship for its contexts in academia, church and society.



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## Chapter 3

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## Chapter 4

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