



# Recurriculation: a pedagogical necessity for theological education at a post-apartheid public university

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## Abstract

Education, especially theological education at institutions of higher learning has taken on a new form. Some institutions have discontinued the theological and religious pedagogies and curricular, while others have re-aligned themselves to conform to the new South Africa. Christian faith still enjoys the privilege of dominance in theological education offered by post-apartheid public universities in South Africa. It is an inevitable task to complete a critique of the hegemony manifested in the history of theology at universities. In line with decolonisation of theological education, recurriculation has become a challenge for the historically Calvinistic reformed tradition. The demographics of public universities has changed dramatically. Due to the multicultural, multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multireligious institutions, universities are currently the melting pot of South Africa, governed by a secular constitution that abhors prejudice or discrimination against sexual orientation, racism, disability, and religious conviction. Doing postcolonial theology entails both critique and reconstruction. There is a need for an alternative way of doing theology as well as an alternative vision of reality.

**Key words:** Recurriculation, theology, education, post-Apartheid, university, religion.

## Introduction

At present, post-apartheid South Africa still enjoys the privilege of theological education offered at some public universities that offer undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in theology and religion as disciplines. Most of the qualifications align with Christian studies rather than with other religions. Some university faculties were and still are the training grounds for specific denominations, particularly the Dutch Reformed family churches. Some institutions offer religion studies on other religions such as Islam, African Traditional Religions and so forth, whereas others offer purely Christian training. The bottom line is that the Christian faith still prevails in theological education at post-apartheid public universities in South Africa.

## Historical overview of theology at apartheid public universities

Some universities in South Africa have always been characterized by a plethora that synergized or enhanced the ideology of separate development (apartheid). Generally, the apartheid regime restricted its Black majority citizens from basic and higher education. The Bantu Education Act of 1954, known as the Verwoerdian Act, denied basic and, hence, minimal university education to the Black child.

There were five categories of universities in South Africa. The English universities (University of Cape Town/UCT, University of the Witwatersrand/Wits, University of Natal/UN, and Rhodes) were specifically for White English citizens. The Afrikaans universities included Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), Pretoria (UP), Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PUCHE), University of the Orange Free State (UOFS), Stellenbosch (US), and University of Port Elizabeth (UPE). The mainstream Black universities were categorized



ethnically. The University of the North (Turfloop), whose postal address was P.O. Sovenga was for the Sotho, the Venda, and the Shangaan-speaking people, the University of Fort Hare was for the Xhosa-speaking people and the University of Zululand for the Zulu-speaking people. Other ethnic students, who wished to pursue a field of study that was not available at their ethnic institutions, could join any of the above universities. Some Black students attended Wits to study medicine, because their ethnic institutions did not have a medical faculty. Some Sotho (Tswana, Northern or Southern Sotho) students pursued agricultural studies at Fort Hare because the University of the North did not have a Faculty of Agriculture. Later, Black universities were joined by homeland universities that emerged when those homelands obtained some quasi- or nominal independence (e.g. University of Bophuthatswana, University of Venda, and University of Transkei). Post 1994, the evolutionary processes of detribalization and detraditionalization were undertaken for historically Afrikaans and homeland universities by means of institutional merger processes; and the change of language policies that are still an issue for some of the former Afrikaans universities.

Universities for the Coloured (University of the Western Cape/UWC) people had a strong Faculty of Theology curriculated along the Reformed tradition. The Indian (University of Durban-Westville/UDW) population also had Faculty of Theology, with some religious studies in the form of comparative religious studies.

All the Afrikaans Universities; except UPE had Faculties of Theology. University of South Africa (UNISA) was the only bilingual (English and Afrikaans) and distance-learning institution that offered tuition to all racial groups nationally and internationally. It also had the privilege of a strong and reputable Faculty of Theology based on the Calvinistic Reformed tradition, although the mainline Dutch Reformed Church regarded it as liberal.

Black students in Theology were trained at Fort Hare, for predominantly English churches, and at the University of the North (Stofberg), for the Dutch Reformed ministerial formation. Stofberg academy was developed alongside Turfloop campus. It later moved to QwaQwa and became part of the University of QwaQwa (UniQwa). The new dispensation in both the DRC and the nation led to the closure of this academy, as UniQwa became a campus of the University of the Free State, and the Dutch Reformed Church's internal politics surfaced. Most of the non-Dutch Reformed students regarded Fort Hare as their training ground. In fact, many of the current Black theologians are the graduates of Fort Hare, especially those from the Presbyterian, Anglican, Congregational, and Methodist traditions. Rhodes' Department of Religion and Theology closed in 2000.

Given this historical development from colonialism and apartheid, post-apartheid scholarship faces the challenges of understanding the workings of the current global system as a way of avoiding the perpetuation of the structures and ideals of coloniality. The current scholarship also needs to be committed to the production of alternative knowledge based on experiences of African knowledge systems (Ramantswana, 2016:189). The imbalances of the past should be redressed.

During one of the decolonisation discourses held at the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of the Free State, Venter (2017:1) stated that it is an inevitable task to complete a critique of the hegemony manifested in the history of theology at universities. He asked some critical and crucial questions:

Why are the Reformed Tradition and White male theologians so dominant at the RSA theological faculties, esp. at the US, UP, UFS and NWU? This is no incidental occurrence, but the result of historical, geo-political and cultural dynamics. Unfortunately, no comprehensive postcolonial history of theology and the public university in South Africa has been undertaken.



## The post-apartheid university

The dawn of democracy, with its re-formulated Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), faced the mammoth task of reforming higher education. Soudien (in Venter & Tolmie, 2012:21) points out that:

The higher education sector, emerging from over a hundred years of discrimination against people of colour, against the poor, and against important segments of society such as rural people, women, linguistic groups, and so on, by way of conference, symposia and public debates, has been considering how it will manage the questions of inclusion and exclusion.

Indisputably, as multicultural, multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multireligious institutions, South African universities are currently the melting pot of the new South Africa. De Freitas (in Venter, 2011:33-34) rightly characterizes the post-apartheid public university as a concept that provides

a higher education system that is prepared to accommodate diversity; ... a university that should be geared towards accommodating religions and beliefs across the board, whether in an employment, teaching or scholarly context. To think otherwise would most certainly be counterproductive towards the spirit of the Constitution of South Africa.

The university has become a convergence of citizens from the divided society, legacy of our national history. Theology at this kind of university

must now begin to take into account the needs and contexts of the students in question, which, in the case of South Africa, involves the reality of a multicultural and multi-religious society (Segovia, 2000:76-77).

In the 1990s, Black students moved into former White universities. Jansen (2012:9) refers to this as the most impressive rapid change. The learning environment has changed dramatically; therefore, the curriculum and pedagogy must change accordingly. New didactics must be formulated for more relevant teaching and learning. Pedagogics is constantly changing. Students' worldviews, personal inclinations, and pragmatic attitudes are diverse and differ from those of their parents and communities.

With their Calvinistic and Reformed orientation, Faculties of Theology and Religion are now facing a surging ecumenism, exacerbated by the government's capping on churches' private institutions, where different denominations conducted their own ministerial trainings and formations. For many denominations, the demands of the DHE, through its Council of Higher Education (CHE), are too high a bar to reach. This populates the public universities with potential candidates for ministries in local churches. If the latter had their own seminaries or colleges, they would provide their own spiritual formation and specific academy appropriate to their institutional and confessional needs (Draper, 2015:85).

These faculties are no longer the bastions of Dutch Reformed ideology or Afrikaner Calvinistic dictates. They form part of public universities and must serve the citizens with theology that is decolonised and contextual to South Africa's situation and needs. "The purpose of the public university encapsulates a primary or foundational conceptual point of departure" (De Freitas, in Venter, 2011:37). This calls for re-curriculation to situate these institutions within the new dispensation, where religion is reputedly a moral compass of the nation's ethos. Therefore, religion at post-apartheid university is crucial, since it promotes a vital link "between theologies with social-scientific consciousness in the academy, which has been very crucial in developing the public nature of theology" (Phiri & Nadar, in Venter, 2011:85).

Westernized theology shapes the minds at the Faculties of Theology. The question arises in academic circles: "Is there a way where the two different theologies meet?" One is called on



to rethink theological education within the concrete context of operation. It is a fact that all of South Africa's universities have, since their inception, adopted Western models of academic organisation, which largely, excluded and decimated the indigenous knowledge systems of the colonised people. The colonial model of academic organisation is based on Western disciplinary knowledge. It was entrenched, engrossed and enhanced during apartheid and has not yet been redressed in the post-apartheid era. Although student demographics have changed significantly at the majority of the historically advantaged universities, academic staff demographics and curriculum designers have not changed.

### **Recurriculation defined**

This is the process whereby new formal learning programmes are to change in order to comply with both internal and external approval. It considers the capacity of the institution, the professional bodies, and the government (i.e. the Department of Higher Education and Training -DHET). Recurriculation means the introduction of a new learning programme whose purpose, outcomes, field of study, mode or site of delivery have changed considerably. The learning outcomes, purpose and content necessitates changes in module prerequisite or core-requisite. This might lead to changes to title modules, credit value of a module, and assessment mode. This will, in turn, dictate the restructuring of the module, whether it should be a term, a semester, or a year module. As academics engage in recurriculation processes; for the new module, they consider academic and professional standing, coherence, access and articulation, sustainability, as well as site and seat for effective delivery of that module.

The post-apartheid university engages in recurriculation, as transformation cannot be effected in the institutional culture without re-imagining curriculum and pedagogics. South Africa's emerging culture calls for new directions in higher education. Learning about diversity is crucial in light of this changing sociocultural landscape in classrooms, congregations, and universities. Recurriculation is necessitated by the need for genuine curriculum change that demands a deeper enquiry into the kinds of values, attitudes and beliefs that sustain offensive behaviour across universities (Jansen, in Venter & Tolmie, 2012:13). Historical and cultural bigotries need be addressed during the recurriculation processes

It is critically important to note that an African theological education must contextually take the issues of gender justice very seriously, especially in the African context, to fight against oppressive patriarchal movements. Recurriculation is part of epistemological transformation that engages knowledge that seeks understanding of the context from which to draw lessons by comparisons in order to gain insight (Resane, 2018:9).

### **Rationale for recurriculation**

Colonialism has edged itself not only into the curriculum content, but also into the very structures of the curriculum. Curriculum needs regular renewal. Content has to reflect diversity of knowledge. The inevitable salient characteristics of new learners make recurriculation a necessity, due to the pressure to comply with national legislative imperatives for institutions of higher learning. Pressure is also exerted to enhance students' learning so that this may lead to higher throughput rates. The university structures of corporate governance also call for compliance with the standards meeting their refined vision, mission, and core values. This is confirmed by Prochario-Foley (2017:266). In place of rigorous academic critique, the counter modern perspective is content with hagiography to exalt the legends and heroics of institutional founders

Besides all these demands, the post-apartheid university is under pressure to achieve national and international competitive standards through curricular offerings that contribute to the economic successes of the country, the continent, and the world at large.



The modern academy has indeed been submerged inside the logics of capitalism and the desires of the market such that Western education is orientated toward fiduciary ends, presenting itself as the crucial means through which people may realize the profit of their potential (Jennings, 2017:61)

This university must shed the history and colonial legacy that was imagined primarily for White males and 'others' subjectivity to the established systems of patriarchy. This system is a misnomer, because it presents non-White races, minorities, women, people with disabilities, people with sexual orientation, and minority faculties as guests in a house not made for them (Jennings, 2017:59). The progressive universities are those that champion the institution-led processes of curriculum review. These necessary rhetorics usher in the biblical scholarship that seeks "to promote and protect human dignity, and abandon syllogisms that entertain principles of dehumanization" (M.Afr, 2015:40). It is an undeniable fact that colonial history imprints in the minds of the colonized some negatives that drive towards resistance. The missionary enterprises and colonial expansion collaborate symbiotically for free looting and plundering expeditions, of the slave trade, of the conquest of newly discovered overseas territories, the examination of the original inhabitants and establishment of colonial settlement by migration (P'Bitek, 2011:16).

As elsewhere, the first consideration deals with history. The South African higher education is marred by the negative history of racial discrimination and colonial enhancement. Historically, Christian apologists made Euro-American culture superior to all cultural identities. Western culture was conflated with theological interpretation and religious practices, creating Christian supremacy that gave birth to White supremacy. Colonialism, Christianity and Culture, were wrapped and covered with the cloth of education. Missionaries were the mercenaries of their countries of origins.

It was Christian European missionaries who carried the pride of race and culture, who cooperated with the colonial administrators in raping lands of their resources and of raping people of their humanity, and who were so confident that God had smiled on the West and would give them victory and an abundant harvest as the Christian colonizers of the non-Western world (Fears, 2017:21).

The missionary education developed the social elite that is detached from the grassroots ills. In Africa and North America, education innovated what Goto (2017:35-37) calls a Black-White binary – a dichotomy that always classifies people not according to their intellect, but according to their social standing *proximated* to White supremacy. In redressing this imbalance of the past, the Department of Education (DOE) in 1997, formulated and captured the vision of the transformed higher education. Lange (in Venter & Tolmie 2012:32) captures this vision vividly:

It has to promote equity of access and success; offer teaching and learning programmes as well as research that meet national development goals and global demands; support democratic ethos, critical discourse and creative thinking, and support the advancement of all forms of knowledge (DOE, 1997:1.3.).

The bottom line remains: Theology in a secular post-apartheid university is undoubtedly under siege and in some institutions, pushed into some obscurity. Its presence in the academy is questioned. Balcomb (2012:9) mentions that it has to justify its existence by conforming to the standards and norms of the modern university. This means that it has to become intellectually relevant in terms of modern definitions of rationalistic thought.

The call by student movements since 2015 for the decolonisation of education necessitates some radical re-curriculation of the teaching contents and methods. Re-curriculation is the answer, as the South African higher education urgently needs a vision to challenge the racial antagonisms of the colonial masters of the Western world. The current education is offered and obtained in the language, thought forms, and cultural sensibilities of the colonial masters



(Jennings, 2017:60). It collaborates with the vocations that should share some responsibility in dealing with global racial animus. Calling for the decolonisation of education is a just critique of Western epistemological system over against indigenous systems of knowledge (Jennings, 2017:59). The decolonisation of education is an opportunity for institutions of higher education to reconsider teaching content and methodology, while at the same time carefully considering their own pedagogical practices in creating structures of belonging within the theological academy. Indeed, decolonisation is a process of “embodying a new ecology of learning that reverses the colonial legacy of education” (Jennings, 2017:63). There is a need to close the gaps in the higher education system. There is a need for theological education with a more dialogical, contemporary, and hopeful approach (Nagle, 2017:257). The education fraternity agree on the journey towards dismantling the ills of, and in the higher education system. This is an eschatological deliberation.

Deep communion, real relationality, the kind of fulsome respect that flows outward and through an entire community on the other hand leads to wanting to share, wanting to continue to learn, indeed, to ‘discipline’ in the best and truest sense of that word. It feeds deeply and abundantly the journey of dismantling racism (Hess, 2017:52).

Relevant rearticulation processes should consider enhancing the university culture characterized by universality, diversity, and community engagement (Wethmar, in Venter & Tolmie, 2012:75). The post-apartheid university cannot exist in isolation. It has to be rooted in the socio-cultural context. Institutional racism and ubiquitous forms of bigotry frames and necessitates the new curriculum that is contextually relevant. De Gruchy (2011:23) calls for doing theology as a “way of engaging Christian faith within the life of church within a given social and cultural context.” This is a decolonial option that calls for pedagogies and didactics that appreciate the fullness and dignity of humanity “by undoing the structures of oppression and domination, thereby dethroning whiteness” (Ramantswana, 2016:184).

The Y-Generation’s entry into the universities also necessitates radical rearticulation processes. This calls on post-apartheid universities to rearticulate in such a way that academics and students can relate to each other. Hess (2017:47) describes getting proximate as: coming to awareness of my own history within this system, and then building relationships that are truly accountable with people who are located quite differently

The current academics need to change the narratives of teaching the new generation. It is imperative to touch the present without ignoring the past, as the past defines who we are. This is particularly true in Africa. Africans define who they are by their history.

We need to prepare a new generation of South African students with a knowledge that is broader, more inclusive, more generous and more embracing than what we inherited from the past (Jansen, 2012:10).

The post-apartheid universities’ Faculties of Theologies rearticulate in order to offer an inclusive curriculum that addresses the role of liberation theologies (African, Black, and Feminist Theologies), eco-theologies, and public theologies. The Y-Generation aspires to these values. These theologies are the ideals entrenched in both the South African Constitution and the Freedom Charter. Boesak (in Venter & Tolmie, 2012:107) points to these values as democracy, equality, respect for, and embracing diversity in all its aspects, non-racialism and non-sexism, justice, human rights, and national reconciliation. Post 1994, these have become the foci of structured institutions such as churches, schools, universities, and Non-Profit Organisations.

This is an inevitable change. Altering the curriculum is an essential part of this change. This does not mean that Jan van Riebeck or HF Verwoerd should pack their ships or wagons and leave universities once and for all. It simply requires a different way of teaching that enables us to change our minds regarding literature by women, people of colour, as well as socially



and culturally excluded groups. Being familiar with these manuscripts and monographs is essential to the kind of skills cultivated by and assessed in a literary studies degree. It is not an optional extra. Recurriculation is similar to the *hermeneutic of grafting* whereby

The quest for human dignity and the perpetual desire to bridge the gap between all classes, races, sexes and what-have-you, make it imperative that scripture be read with African spectacles (among several other spectacles) and heard in African as well as other contexts as a “Hermeneutic of Grafting” (Akoto-Abutiata, 2014:15).

### **Recurriculation points towards decolonisation of theology**

Since the #FeesMustFall Movement in 2015, the prevalent buzzword has been decolonisation or decolonised education. It is crucial to decolonise South Africa’s universities. This will involve the creation of a radical curriculum suitable for a diversified academic population. The rationale behind this is that the entire curriculum structure is part of our colonial inheritance. This calls for a radical change, as suggested by Bujo (2006:130):

The African theologian who wishes to confront the modern challenge must be prepared to call into question the whole of his or her foreign education, and seek to construct a truly incarnated Christianity, which will take equally into account both the old tradition and the demands of the modern situation.

The curriculum should focus on graduates attributes such as active, critical, constructive citizens who are entrepreneurs, employees, and leaders. Theological field of study have, over the years, reflected a distinct lack of engagement with the African continent. African theological academics and intellectuals have long tried to break down the colonial shackles and decolonise their theological disciplines in the institutions.

Decolonisation of theology involves the fundamental rethinking and reframing of the curriculum emanating from and centring on South Africa and the continent in teaching, learning and research. Decolonisation of theology also means that a curriculum must become independently national or indigenous with regard to design, delivery, outcomes, and graduate attributes.

University recurriculation involves replacing academic works from the global North with local theorists and African authors, in order to prevent African universities from becoming mere extensions of former colonisers. Now is an opportune time to dictate quota for the balance of research to cite a higher percentage of African scholarship than the Western one, in order to comprehend African epistemologies. African self-reflection comes into play for this role. However, decolonisation cannot mean reversing technological advancement and going back to prehistorical eras when everything was simply *arcana caelestia* (celestial mysteries). African researchers are encouraged to be conscious of the different life worlds in Africa. They are encouraged to undertake research that

Requires the researcher to not only think rationally, but to be able to feel impulse from the research subjects. The ability to both feel and rationalise can be enhanced through self-reflection about how the researcher and subjects in the present reality are interrelated and interdependent of all phenomena, including the life-worlds of other people (Velthuisen, in Msila, 2017:75).

Recurriculation, especially in the field of theological education, is to stage an “image of hermeneutics as a ‘fusion of horizons’ – the transformative encounter between different historical periods, traditions or cultures” (Brett, 2009:193). When properly enacted, decolonisation of education generally restores people’s self-image, dignity, and integrity. Birmingham (1995:89-90) accentuates the fact that decolonisation erases the view that blackness means inferiority.



## Conclusion

This paper argues that colonialism has edged itself not only into the curriculum content, but also into the very structures of the curriculum. Therefore, the curriculum needs to be renewed regularly. Content has to reflect diversity of knowledge. Doing postcolonial theology entails the task not only of critique, but also of reconstruction. There is a need for an alternative way of doing theology and for an alternative vision of reality. Decolonised or postcolonial theology is the advocacy that “resolutely resists new temptations to exercise mastery over others” (Brett, 2009:182). It is to “imagine a human community shaped by discourses of love and freedom, rather than dominance and captivity” (Travis, 2014:90). Decolonisation of theology aims at correct interpretation of humanity anthropologically, psychologically, and sociologically from a theological perspective. It deals with humanity that carries the *imago Dei*, therefore deserving reverent respect. Recurriculation of theological project is putting humanity at the centre in reverence. P’Bitek (2011:26) points out that:

Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else, we may find ourselves treading on men’s dreams.

Recurriculation is thus undoubtedly a pedagogical necessity for the post-apartheid university.

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