Editorial

The Faculty looks back on 30 years of grace. This edition illustrates the influence of the Faculty reaching into Africa, building relationships internationally with Yale University in the USA and Titus Brandsma Institute in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. The season of the Holy Spirit is at hand, a time for reflection and preparation for what the Spirit wants to do through us. The work of the Holy Spirit in people like Jonathan Edwards in the previous century is still continued today through people studying Edwards’ contributions. Theologians from Europe and Africa shape the lives of students here and in Africa. The Lord equips his children to boldly declare the Kingdom of the Lord in all spheres of life, private and public, as part of your culture and sometimes contrary to your culture.

May you experience God’s blessing in your ministry!

Lyzette Hoffman

Faculty 30 years

Thirty years ago, the 1st of July 1980 saw the official opening of the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Free State. It was a small, humble beginning with only 6 professors and 30 students: 21 in the BTh 1 class and 9 in the BTh 2 class. Thirty years later the Faculty has increased its numbers to 13 lecturers and approximately 300 students. The Faculty is thus privileged to look back upon thirty years of growth and development. Sincere gratitude to every lecturer and every student who contributed so much to the Faculty. It has paid great dividends: in communities, in society and in all the disciplines of theology! With such a history what else can we expect? The Faculty is very excited and enthusiastic about the future and its challenges.

-Prof Francois Tolmie, Dean
Seek to improve knowledge

In 1739 Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon from Heb 5:13-14, emphasising the importance of knowledge that directs us to God. Prof Adriaan Neele from the Jonathan Edwards Centre at Yale University, US, conducted a prayer meeting at the Faculty of Theology referring to this sermon of Jonathan Edwards. He encouraged students and faculty to be serious about reading the Scripture. Do not be content with a cursory reading. As Edwards emphasised, growth in knowledge must not be sought for applause or to win arguments, but for the benefit of your soul and to practice what you've learned. St. Augustine's prayer was that we practice in our life what we hear from God. Students in the Department of Church History and Ecclesiology and polity had the privilege of receiving lectures from Prof Neele during his stay in Bloemfontein.

Lesotho student enrols for Master’s studies on Jonathan Edwards

Ntabanyane Samson Khama Tseuoa is one of the first post-graduate students enrolled at the Jonathan Edwards Centre Africa. Reverent Samson is from the Lesotho Evangelical Church at Maputso. He studied at the Morija Theological Seminary in the outskirts of Maseru and also obtained an honours’ degree in Theology at the University of the Free State. Samson believes that his studies in the work of Jonathan Edwards will enrich his ministry. Samson’s wife is involved in an NGO organisation in Lesotho. They have two daughters. The Jonathan Edwards Centre Africa proposes to offer the opportunity for research in the life and work of Jonathan Edwards, a revival preacher in the United States who lived from 1703 to 1758. Prof Dolf Britz is the director of this Centre which is managed in collaboration with Yale University in the US.

- To read about this Centre: Click here

Trinity and beauty: The contribution of Jonathan Edwards

"Jonathan Edwards had a profound intuition that the biblical God is essentially glorious, excellent and beautiful," claimed Prof Rian Venter, Department of Systematic Theology, in his paper presented at the inauguration of the Jonathan Edwards Centre Africa. Being and beauty are one in God. Beauty gives an insight into the mystery of God. For Edwards there is a connection between beauty and holiness. Beauty is inherently relational and requires complexity. Creation is the overflow of divine beauty. The Christian faith testifies to a God who is beautiful and beautifying. The intellectual labour by Edwards continues reminding us about this. We are fortunate that our ethical practices, our apologetical efforts, our artistic expressions and our contextual engagements may be beautiful, because the triune God is excellent.
Faith, religion and the public university

An interdisciplinary conference on the theme of faith, religion and the public university was hosted by the Faculty of Theology from 23-24 MARCH 2010. The main speakers included Prof Wentzel van Huyssteen (Princeton, USA), Isabel Phiri (KwaZulu-Natal) and Anton van Niekerk (Stellenbosch). Parallel sessions were also presented by speakers from the fields of law, physics, sociology, philosophy and theology. Annemie Pattyn from the Catholic University Leuven, Belgium, shared her experience of the presenting of a compulsory confessional religious education programme at their university. The aim of this course is to help students realize that religion is not a crutch as some Europeans believe, but something that makes you even more fully human. Prof Shaun de Freitas from the Faculty of Law at the UFS draw attention to the pluralist platform for communication that must be taken into consideration in the issue of religion and the public university. In hosting this conference the Faculty of Theology demonstrated that Theology cannot be sidestepped in the debate of religion at a public university. Prof Rian Venter, Department of Systematic Theology, organized the conference. He will also be the guest-editor of a special edition of Acta Theologica with contributions from this conference.

For more information on the conference: Click here

What happened in this congregation?

Within the context of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) many congregations are struggling to survive. Discussions and energy in these congregations tend to centre on what can be done to survive, focussing on what needs to be fixed. However, Prof Kobus Schoeman emphasised the importance of “appreciative Inquiry” (A.I.) in these instances. He delivered a paper at the annual Theological Day of the Free State Faculty of Theology in Bloemfontein. A.I. assumes that even the most challenged congregation has stories and practices that can produce a hopeful future. “Congregations should start by focusing on the positive. Rather ask which positive things happened in this congregation and what can be learned from that,” remarked Prof Schoeman.

In recent research done in a Dutch Reformed congregation it was found that leadership of a congregation would do well to have regular focus groups that discuss the positive core of the congregation. Prof Schoeman is head of the Department Practical Theology at the University of the Free State.

Sacrifices to ancestors presented in new light

Some traditional African Christians from both mainline churches and African Independent
Some traditional African Christians from both mainline churches and African Independent churches still bring sacrifices to their ancestors. Rev Joseph Pali, lecturer in the Department of Practical Theology, addressed this issue in his paper read at the annual conference of the New Testament Society of South Africa. The conference was held at the University of KwaZulu Natal from 19 to 22 April 2010. The practice of sacrifices to the ancestors is part of the background of traditional black African Christians. For these Christians the implication is that the sacrifices that are made in the name of culture are to the ancestors, spirits and supposedly also to God. The purpose is to achieve communion with the ancestors, appease them and to induce them to help with whatever is needed at that time. Although this practice can form a rich background for an in depth understanding of the sacrifice of Christ, is not a practice to be encouraged among Christians. The exegesis made from Heb 9: 11-10:18 reveals the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice for us as Christians. The benefits are is perfection, sanctification, purification and forgiveness which are the things that were lacking or limited from the sacrifices practiced in the old Levitical system. “It is no longer necessary to continue practice of sacrifices to the ancestors as what we need from those sacrifices is found in abundance in the sacrifice of Christ,” concluded rev. Pali.

Student news

Third year theology student recently attended a camp on experiential learning. Rev. Christo Louw, pastor in Kvsiekampus Student Congregation, as well as Pieter Nel, final year theology student, presented the camp.
A workshop for students of the masters’ degree in Biblical spirituality was recently held at Menuah, just outside Bloemfontein. On the photo from the left is the primary lecturers of the course proff Kees Waaijman,( Titus Brandsma Institute of the Radbound University Nijmegen, the Netherlands) Pieter de Villiers (professor extraordinary, Faculty of Theology, UFS) and Jos Huls (Titus Brandsma Institute).

Prof Rian Venter (Department of Systematic Theology, UFS) presented the first series of lectures in a new Masters’ degree programme at Lusaka. A collobaration agreement was drawn up between the University of the Free State and the Justo Mwale Theological University College in Lusaka.