



On Saving Theology in Public Universities in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The status of theological education is declining in public universities in Africa. This article focused on the decline of theology in South African public universities. The article attempted to assess the attempts to restore the status of theology through pluralist, ecumenical, scientific interdisciplinary and humanist approaches. It argued that these approaches are not likely to save theology in public universities but will create a vacuum to be filled by unregistered and substandard theological institutions. These substandard theological institutions have confessional approaches that fill the gap created by secularist approaches adopted by public universities. The public universities are challenged to realise the uniqueness of theology from other disciplines and its importance in preventing the mile-long but inch-deep church in South Africa. This article contributes to the saving of theology in public universities by challenging churches to actively seek ways of influencing theological education in public universities because they, the churches, are the primary beneficiaries of theology education.

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INTRODUCTION

Several theologians in South Africa decry that theological education has lost its status in public universities.¹ Faculties of theology and religion have had to justify their existence within the universities. Buitendag and Simut narrate the journey taken by the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria to justify the existence of theology in the public university.² Kgatle describes the decline of theology's status as the "dearth and death of theology in public universities."³

¹ Elelwani Farisani, "Impact of New Policy Developments in Higher Education on Theological Education," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36 (2010): 1–10; Mookgo S. Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45, no. 1 (January 15, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.2891>.

² Johan Buitendag and Corneliu C. Simut, "Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 73, no. 1 (February 28, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i1.4806>; Johan Buitendag and Corneliu C. Simut, "Ecodomy as Education in Tertiary Institutions. Teaching Theology and Religion in a Globalised World: African Perspectives," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (June 23, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.5956>; Corneliu C. Simut, "Teaching Religion as Change for Social Transformation in Contemporary African and Non-African Universities: A South African Manifesto," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 2 (June 12, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i2.8169>.

³ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 2.

However, in an email correspondence, Kgatle clarified that in the abovementioned article,⁴ he used “dearth and death of theology”, “as a warning, not [a verdict on] the current status of theology.”⁵ Here, one must recall the words of Van Niekerk who defined theology as a “theory of faith” to mean that “theology is the formulation theories which from the perspective of faith make statements about God, [hu]man [beings] and the world.” This view of theology follows the one held by older theologians such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner who viewed theology as emanating from the community of faith – the church and existing for it. Barth said the church produces theology by subjecting herself to a “self-test” as she “faces herself with the question of truth; that is, she measures her action, her language about God, against her existence as a church.”⁶ In other words, theology, while confessional, was a critical engagement with one’s faith in the light of the world in which the person lived. Indeed, the status of theology in public universities in South Africa is dire. Interestingly, this dearth and death of theology in South African public universities come at a time when Christianity in the country is experiencing phenomenal growth.

According to the government statistics authority, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), the 2022 Census indicated that 85.3% of the population claim to follow some form of Christianity.⁷ This raises the question of how the dearth and death of theology in public universities can be explained when Christianity is growing in the country. That 85.3% of the population claims some form of allegiance to Christianity means that at any given time, most students enrolled in public universities are Christian. Therefore, why is this large population of Christians shunning theology to the extent that theology is dying out of the university?

This article assesses the responses of theologians to the dearth and death of theology in public universities in South Africa from a conservative theological perspective that views theology as first and foremost a “function of the church”.⁸ However, the position of this article is that the confessional function of theology in the church should be scientifically critical and rigorous but without creating a gap between it and the church. The article begins by describing the state of the decline of theology in public universities in South Africa. It then proceeds to highlight the irony of theology’s decline while the church is growing in South Africa and moves on to examine how theologians can affirm the place of theology in public universities and assess their proposals on how theology can be saved in public universities. The article closes by questioning the strength of secular humanistic approaches in saving theology in universities. It concludes by calling on the church to wake up and play a prominent role in preventing the death of theology in public universities. This article recognises that this is a complex problem without an easy solution particularly because, as Naidoo points out, “the changes to a multi-faith stance has brought new debates on the role of Christian theology in the university, especially the place of confessional theology”.⁹ The contribution of this article lies in challenging South African churches to actively seek ways to influence theological education in public universities because it is churches that are the primary beneficiaries of theology education.

THEOLOGY, A DISCIPLINE MOVING TOWARDS EXTINCTION?

Kgatle’s description of the state of theology in public universities as a state of dearth and death paints a picture of a discipline moving towards extinction in South African public universities. Ironically, the decline of theology in South African public universities, worsened in the post-1994 democratic era when many universities shut down faculties of theology or reduced them to smaller departments.¹⁰ According to Kgatle, as the situation currently stands, as of July 2024, theology can only be studied in eight public universities in South Africa, the University of South Africa, the University of Pretoria, the University of the Free State, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the University of Fort Hare, the

⁴ Kgatle, “An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University.”

⁵ Mookgo S. Kgatle, E-Mail correspondence, August 10, 2024

⁶ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Doctrine of Reconciliation Part One*, vol. 4 (Edinburg : T & T Clark, 1956), 2.

⁷ Stats SA, ‘South African Census 2022: Census Release’ (Pretoria: Statistics South Africa, 2022), 24.

⁸ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics: Vol. I*, trans. Olive Wyon (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 3.

⁹ Rian Venter, “Interview–Prof. Marilyn Naidoo,” *Acta Theologica* 39, no. 2 (2019): 1–8.

¹⁰ Farisani, “Impact of New Policy Developments in Higher Education on Theological Education,” 2.

University of North-West, the Stellenbosch University and the University of the Western Cape, while other universities such as the University of Cape Town, the University of Johannesburg, and others offer religious studies.¹¹ To the list provided by Kgatle should be added the University of Venda,¹² which offers theology from Bachelor to Doctoral level which means currently (July 2024) there are at least nine South African public universities offering theological studies. It is interesting to note that the universities that have retained theology at a faculty level, namely, the University of the Free State, University of North-West, University of Pretoria and Stellenbosch have very strong Afrikaans roots and affiliation with the Dutch Reformed Church. Significantly, the Dutch Reformed Church has played an important role in protecting the status of theology in public universities, which in turn has ensured the availability of theology to the wider ecumenical community. Considering the role played by theology and theologians in igniting and galvanizing the fires of liberation from Apartheid, the sad implication of the decline of theological education from public universities is that theology has become irrelevant in the establishing and nurturing of South Africa's liberation. While theology played a role in the establishment of the Apartheid system, it also played a role in arousing and sustaining the resistance to Apartheid, as some of the key leaders in the fight against Apartheid were people of faith. One of the foundational challenges faced by theology in democratic South Africa is that it did not successfully manage the transition from contributing to the fall of Apartheid to contributing to the building of the liberated state. For, the intensity of the theological activity that contributed to the end of apartheid waned significantly in the post-apartheid liberated era. Writing in 1998, when democracy was still fairly new, Williams records sensing "an overall feeling of a loss of direction [and] uncertainty about what theology should be concerned with in the new South Africa."¹³ One still wonders whether 30 years of democracy has enabled theology to overcome its loss of direction and uncertainty regarding its role in democratic South Africa.

On the other hand, the low acceptance of theology is not unique to South Africa. Several scholars report that theological education in contemporary Africa faces many challenges that threaten its existence in a public academy.¹⁴ It is not even unique to Africa. As an example, Theocarous narrates that in present-day Greece, the majority of churches that believe in lay service and theological qualifications rarely attract a salary, resulting in most ministers becoming tent-makers.¹⁵ Furthermore, even in contemporary Greek churches that pay salaries to ministers, it is extremely difficult to attract students for training for ministry because many Christian parents discourage their children from pursuing theological studies since it would never measure up to more profitable and prestigious careers.¹⁶ Theocarous' statements show that the dearth and death of theology are not limited to South Africa.

THE DECLINE OF THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

It is observed that the decline of theology in South African universities occurred in the post-1994 democratic era when university education was democratised giving the majority black population full access to all universities in the republic. The decline of theology in South African universities can therefore be attributed to a lack of economic relevance in democratic South Africa. Farisani describes the relationship between theology's lack of economic relevance and the dwindling enrolments of students studying theology in public universities.¹⁷ He emphasizes that the decline of theology in

¹¹ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 1-2.

¹² University of Venda, "Department of Human Sciences," 2024, <https://www.univen.ac.za/faculties/humanities-social-science-and-education/departments-of-human-sciences/>.

¹³ D. T. Williams, "Theology in South Africa: The Current Situation," *Themelios* 23 (1998): 27-41.

¹⁴ WP Wahl, "Towards Relevant Theological Education in Africa: Comparing the International Discourse with Contextual Challenges," *Acta Theologica* 33, no. 1 (August 21, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v33i1.14>; James N Amanze, "The Voicelessness of Theology and Religious Studies in Contemporary Africa: Who Is to Blame and What Has to Be Done? Setting a New Agenda," *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 40, no. 3 (2012): 189-204; Ezra Chitando, "Equipped and Ready to Serve? Transforming Theology and Religious Studies in Africa," *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 38, no. 2 (2010): 197-210.

¹⁵ Myrto Theocarous, "'One Does Not Live on Bread Alone': Theological Education as Prophetism," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 24, 2013): 182-89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378813490111>.

¹⁶ Theocarous, "'One Does Not Live on Bread Alone': Theological Education as Prophetism," 184.

¹⁷ Farisani, "Impact of New Policy Developments in Higher Education on Theological Education."

public universities worsened after the attainment of democracy in 1994. Prior to democracy, the majority of black people were excluded from public universities. They were also excluded from theological education in their segregated churches where theological education followed racial lines. Black people received the lowest quality of education compared to other racial groups.¹⁸ After 1994, the decline in theology was caused by the democratic government's emphasis on subjects in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Farisani points out that when the National Commission on Higher Education was adopted just after the attainment of democratic rule, one of its aims was to promote the mass enrolment of youth and adults who were previously excluded from higher education by apartheid policies. However, the deliberate push for STEM-related disciplines that provide better employment opportunities, discouraged people from enrolling in abstract and uneconomic subjects like theology and philosophy that, at their best, confined people to teaching. Farisani highlights a remark made by the then South African President, Thabo Mbeki when he openly expressed the economic valuelessness of studying theology by telling young people that: "If you qualify and come out of teacher training, for instance, with Biblical Studies, you are not going to get very many jobs for that."¹⁹

Mbeki's statement implied that Biblical Studies were only relevant in teaching and of very little value in the practical economic sphere. Complete removal of the study of theology or the reduction of the faculties to smaller departments under humanities or arts is a fulfilment of Mbeki's 'prophecy'.

However, even in the public universities that have kept theology in one form or another the future of the discipline is not guaranteed because of the continuous low student numbers that end up not justifying having the discipline in the university's curriculum. As an example, Kgatle paints the vulnerable state of theology at the University of South Africa (UNISA) by pointing out the downgrading of theology from a faculty level to the current three small separate departments in the School of Humanities.²⁰ The three departments are (i) Biblical and Ancient Studies; (ii) Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology and (iii) Philosophy, and Practical and Systematic Theology. Kgatle indicates that discussions continue to surface about integrating these current three departments into one department which indicates that the future of theology is uncertain. Kgatle asks sobering questions, "If theology becomes one department at UNISA, the main question is what will be the next step? This might mean the death of theology."²¹ Kgatle then asks, "How can theology position itself to remain relevant in a public university?"²² These questions show that there is much that needs to be done to ensure that theology is not kicked out of the university system but also remains in a viable state.

The ensuing question is therefore, can theology be saved? If it can be saved, what should be done to save theological education in public universities? The follow-up question is, by who? That is, who should undertake the efforts of saving theological education in public universities? This researcher asks these questions not to answer them, but to merely highlight the complexity of the problems faced by theology in South African public universities.

THE URGENT NEED FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

However, while theology is declining and dying in public universities the need for theological education and training is increasing as the church continues to grow in South Africa. In one sense one can see a deep hunger for theology that ends up creating a vacuum for dubious and briefcase theological institutions to emerge and fill the deepening gap. For example, when one considers that over 85% of South Africa's population claims some form of allegiance to Christianity, it theoretically means that there are far too many South Africans who require the services of theologically trained church leadership, but there are not enough theological institutions in the country to meet the demand. As already pointed out, theology needs to deal with the sad fact that among the people shunning it in

¹⁸ M Nel, "A Hundred Years of Theological Training in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa," *Acta Theologica* 34, no. 1 (October 17, 2014): 108, <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v34i1.7>.

¹⁹ Farisani, "Impact of New Policy Developments in Higher Education on Theological Education."

²⁰ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 6.

²¹ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 6.

²² Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 1.

public universities and even administrators who campaign for it to be scratched out of the university curriculum, many of them are Christians who see the theology offered in public universities as irrelevant to their life and faith.

Paradoxically, the dearth and death of theology are occurring while many scholars are affirming that there is a shortage of trained full-time and sufficiently equipped lay leadership in South African churches. As Wahl pointed out in 2013,

*On the one hand, there are a vast number of church leaders without any theological education, and on the other hand, there is a huge need to equip part-time ministers and church members in order to fulfil their individual callings.*²³

This statement remains true today. This statement points to the paradox of the decline of theology in public universities amid both the necessity and hunger for theological training in nearly all South African churches. Sadly, experts estimate that over 80% of church leaders in Africa have not received formal theological training.²⁴ It is not clear how the scholars arrived at the 80% figure, but it is hardly disputable that the percentage of pastors who have not undergone formal theological training in Africa is enormously high. If the leaders are insufficiently trained, it clearly means that the situation is worse for the laity, which ultimately means that the church in South Africa is not only unhealthy, but also too weak to be the church it should be to effectively fulfil its mission. This gives the picture of a mile-long but inch-deep church in South Africa.²⁵ It is therefore ironic that there is a decline in enrolment in theological faculties and departments in public universities, to the point of reducing the sizes of the faculties and even totally closing them down when the need to equip leaders is so staggeringly high.

Another irony is that while theology is declining and dying in public universities, there is a lot of theological activity outside these universities, in the institutions run by churches and private individuals. It seems that the church, that is, the large community of various Christians, has lost faith in the theological education offered by the public universities and has set up its own institutions parallel to the theological departments in public universities. However, it must also be acknowledged that historically, many churches and denominations have always had their own theological training institutions that provided lower-level, basic theological training for their pastors and evangelists.²⁶ Knoetze amplifies Naidoo's point that Christians are busy with theological and spiritual formation throughout life, in families, schools, congregations, peer groups and society at large.²⁷ This curriculum does not approach theological training as an academic qualification but as vocational equipping individuals, leaders and laity with basic pastoral and ministerial skills and not the highly critical academic and intellectual training.

Some churches, however, improved their diploma and bachelor's programmes by collaborating or affiliating with departments of theology in public universities that provided quality assurance and certification. This approach enriched and boosted the enrolment numbers in faculties and departments of theology in public universities. However, the new higher educational policies of the post-1994 democratic government ended this nature of collaboration between theological colleges and universities. As a result, the private and church-based theological institutions with enough human and financial resources now pursue their own independent registration and accreditation with the South African Council for Higher Education (CHE). Interestingly, in Zimbabwe, to offer degrees, theological colleges must be affiliated with accredited universities that then register the theological colleges' programmes with the Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (ZimCHE). In the South African case,

²³ Wahl, "Towards Relevant Theological Education in Africa: Comparing the International Discourse with Contextual Challenges," 269.

²⁴ Wahl, "Towards Relevant Theological Education in Africa: Comparing the International Discourse with Contextual Challenges"; Johannes J Knoetze, "Theological Education, Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development in Africa: What Does God Have to Do with It?," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (2022), 1.

²⁵ Knoetze, "Theological Education, Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development in Africa: What Does God Have to Do with It?," 1.

²⁶ Nel, "A Hundred Years of Theological Training in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa."

²⁷ Knoetze, "Theological Education, Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development in Africa: What Does God Have to Do with It?"; Marilyn Naidoo, *Between the Real and the Ideal: Ministerial Formation in South African Churches* (Unisa Press, 2012), 9.

at the time of writing this article (July 2024), DHET's register of colleges, which was last updated by the department on 7 May 2024, listed over 20 registered colleges accredited by CHE to offer diplomas and bachelor's degrees while a few others offer Honours, Masters and Doctoral studies.²⁸ For example, George Whitefield College and The Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa offer up to Masters degrees, while South African Theological Seminary and St Augustine College of South Africa are authorised to offer up to doctoral degrees.²⁹ Considering that the South African Theological Seminary (SATS), is an entirely long-distance institution, it means UNISA is no longer the sole provider of accredited long-distance theological education in South Africa. Furthermore, given UNISA's open and liberal stance, some churches prefer SATS's evangelical confessional approach that has a higher view of the Bible as the word of God and orients the students on the classical doctrines of the conservative universal church. Therefore, the dearth and death of theological education in public universities does not mean theology is a dying discipline in South Africa, but churches have established other sources they trust for their church-based theological education and training.

An interesting twist to the dearth and death of theology in public universities is the high number of South African church leaders and ordinary Christians who enrol for theological training in unregistered theological institutions even up to the doctoral level. The country's minister of higher education and training has on numerous occasions issued warnings against the unregistered institutions.³⁰ The DHET register of colleges has a special list in which the dubious institutions are blacklisted.³¹ However, the trend continues unabated as dubious theological training institutions continue to pop up and attract many students. It can also be argued that some Christians deliberately proceed to register in the condemned colleges and do not heed the warning that the colleges are irregular and not authorised to offer theological training. Furthermore, there is a section of the church that receives and approves religious leaders with questionable qualifications. For example, some of the prophets and apostles who hold these questionable doctrines continue to command a large following of Christians. These leaders are active in Christian communities and some of them are featured on various public radio stations to give sermons, advice and talks. Adorning the title 'Dr' and even 'Professor' they use public radio stations to peddle their teachings and philosophies that resonate with the ordinary believers. Surprisingly, although their qualifications are questionable, yet because of their charisma and claim to be men or women of God, their followers perceive them as spiritual leaders who are more in tune with God than graduates from public universities who are perceived as liberal and unspiritual.

One can ask, why some church leaders would want the qualifications but shun official theological colleges and opt for bogus institutions to receive these qualifications. The answers to this question include the mere reality that some Christian leaders want the status of having the title 'Doctor' or 'Professor' but are not prepared to invest the rigour and hard work required by formal institutions to attain such qualifications. There seems to be a belief that training for Christian ministry should be kept at a simple spiritual and devotional level and avoid critical academic rigour. Some church leaders are prepared to settle for a cheap and easy way of attaining their qualifications even if it means going to a known bogus institution as long as it is perceived as 'spiritual'. The deliberate acquisition of a degree and academic status from bogus institutions is also a sign of a lack of professional and pastoral ethics. One can say that pastors who move around flaunting degrees from bogus institutions either do not see or deliberately ignore the harm it does to their pastoral integrity and testimony as a Christian leader. Considering that no reasonable pastor and even an ordinary Christian will ever accept and respect a congregant who calls themselves a medical doctor or a lawyer based on qualifications obtained from bogus institutions, it can therefore be said that pastors who acquire degrees from bogus institutions do so without or with a poor consideration of the ethical and spiritual implications of such unprofessional action. Furthermore, as already mentioned in some sections above, some church leaders

²⁸ DHET, "Department of Higher Education and Training - DocRegisters," May 7, 2024, <https://www.dhet.gov.za/SitePages/DocRegisters.aspx>.

²⁹ DHET, "Department of Higher Education and Training - DocRegisters."

³⁰ TimesLIVE., "Bogus Bible College Preys on Celebrities "to Sway Public": Nzimande," 2024, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2024-04-22-bogus-bible-college-preys-on-celebrities-to-sway-public-nzimande/>.

³¹ DHET, "Department of Higher Education and Training - DocRegisters."

want the qualifications but shun official theological colleges and opt for unregistered institutions out of mistrust of the theology in public universities because they see it as the corrupted human wisdom that is opposed to God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. One of the challenges faced by theology in public universities is a critical approach that operates as an enemy instead of a friend of faith. Therefore, one of the many challenges faced by the theology course in public universities is the mistrust with which it is viewed by some Christians. Theologians in public universities need to work on overcoming this mistrust to avert the dearth and death of theology. It is unfortunate that while there is so much hunger and need for theological training in churches, this is something that theological education in public universities can meet efficiently, and yet these institutions are shunned by the hungry and needy that they ought to assist.

THE AFFIRMATION OF THE PLACE OF THEOLOGY IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Theologians at public universities have been searching for effective ways of addressing the decline in theology in public universities in South Africa. Some theologians affirm that theology has a place in public universities. According to Kgate, “Questioning the place of theology in a public university is an unnecessary debate.”³² He regards it as so obvious that theology has a place in public universities that it should not be questioned at all. This point is also strongly affirmed by Buitendag and Simut who pose the question: “Does theology have a future in our age of science and technology?”³³ They answer the question with a reference to the geographical and statistical argument made by Professor Marcel Barnard from the Protestant Theological University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, who pointed out that on the African continent, the Christian religion has over 800 million adherents, and it is estimated that by 2050 there will be over 1 billion Christians in sub-Saharan Africa.³⁴ Such geographical and statistical factors demonstrate that the age of science and technology has not invalidated the need for theology. Therefore, public universities need to realise that theology is a need that should not be ignored even in the age of science and technology.

According to Buitendag and Simut “Theology not only has a future but it must remain and develop in universities and other educational institutions because it needs to nurture this unprecedented growth of the Christian religion.”³⁵⁻³⁶ The foregoing section pointed out that some churches were investing in alternative sources of theology outside public universities to satisfy their need and hunger for theological education. This means:

*[E]rasing theology from the academy can be not only academically irresponsible because the practical side of theology has been developing in such an alert pace but also socially problematic because any fulminant progress needs to be closely monitored by specialised people who understand the reality of the theoretical and practical sides of theology and are professionally apt to implement decolonisation [contextual] programmes through education in specific African contexts.*³⁷

Buitendag and Simut highlight the important points that for public universities to scratch out theology from their curriculum will not just be ignoring an obvious pertinent need, but it will also mean the theological trends that develop out of the fulminant growth of the church will escape without any informed and scientific analysis. Given the current socioeconomic and political situation in South Africa, over 85% of the population claims that some form of affiliation with Christianity is something that needs to be interrogated sociologically and psychologically but also theologically – because, among other characteristics, this is also a theological phenomenon.

³² Kgate, “An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University,” 1.

³³ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 22.

³⁴ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 2.

³⁵ Buitendag and Simut, 2.

³⁶ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 2.

³⁷ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 2.

By “implementing decolonisation programmes”, they mean the contextualisation of faith in the lived experiences of the people. Mashabela calls for contextualisation that Africanises theology by taking seriously the deep needs of African people.³⁸ However, Buitendag and Simut’s approach may be criticised for seemingly giving the academy authority over the church by giving the academy the power to verify the authenticity of religious beliefs. Buitendag and Simut counter the possibility of promoting unequal powers by affirming Snyman’s stance that theology must remain in universities because it can serve people in local communities.³⁹ This means that in addition to awareness of the needs of local communities, theology must also render proper service to those communities in every possible sphere, whether it be social, economic, political or academic.⁴⁰ Buitendag and Simut further assert that even though theology has a place in the academy it must, nonetheless, “never remain a preoccupation of the academic world, but it must instead become a public effort to engage in society as widely as possible, which makes decolonising [contextualising and Africanising] efforts possible through the provision of proper education in specific contexts”.⁴¹ For Buitendag and Simut, decolonisation of theology entails theologizing contextually in keeping with local needs and problems.⁴² The important thing in this is the affirmative confirmation of the place of theology in the modern academy dominated by science and technology.

SOME PROPOSALS FOR REVIVING THEOLOGY IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

a. The pluralist and ecumenical approach

If the place and future of theology in Africa are certain, what seems contestable is how theology should function, and how it should be practiced and relate to the church. The researcher recalls Kgatle’s earlier question: “How can theology position itself to remain relevant in a public university?” Kgatle responds that, for theology to remain relevant in a public university it should not be confessional but should be ecumenical and interdisciplinary. In addition to ecumenism, Kgatle advocates for a pluralist religious approach that “go[es] beyond Christian theology to include Islamic studies, Jewish studies, African spirituality, and so forth.”⁴³ In essence, this approach focuses on the plurality of Christianity and the plurality of religions. With reference to Twafik, Brunson shows that Christian theology has a rich history of a pluralistic approach that traces back to St. Mark in Alexandria, Egypt, who established a theological college that encouraged the spirit of research and religious studies and contributed to building the first system of theological studies in the whole world.⁴⁴ St Mark’s theological institution became the cradle of Christian Theology and brought forth great people who resisted the heresies of their age and overwhelmed the world with their deep faith and eloquence.⁴⁵ As Brunson emphasises, one of the prominent approaches to theological education in St Mark’s theological school was the inclusion of religious studies which means it was not only about Christianity, but also understanding other religions.⁴⁶ This shows that Christian theology was not conducted in isolation from other religions but in dialogue with them.

Kgatle advocates for an ecumenical approach by saying that instead of insisting on a confessional theology of a specific denomination, more theologies must be brought to public

³⁸ James K. Mashabela, “Africanisation as an Agent of Theological Education in Africa,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (February 8, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4581>.

³⁹ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 2.

⁴⁰ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 3.

⁴¹ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 4.

⁴² Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 1.

⁴³ Kgatle, “An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University,” 1.

⁴⁴ Alfred R. Brunson, “Current Perspectives on Theological Education in Southern Africa: Achievements and Challenges with Reference to Africa,” in *A Critical Engagement with Theological Education in Africa: A South African Perspective*, ed. Johannes J. Knoetze and Alfred R. Brunson (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2021), 17–31, <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2021.BK273.01>.

⁴⁵ Brunson, “Current Perspectives on Theological Education in Southern Africa: Achievements and Challenges with Reference to Africa,” 5.

⁴⁶ Brunson, “Current Perspectives on Theological Education in Southern Africa: Achievements and Challenges with Reference to Africa,” 5.

universities.⁴⁷ He insists that the theological curriculum in a public university cannot be designed to serve the interest of a particular denomination or Christian tradition but to bring all different denominations to interact with one another.⁴⁸ In Simut's analysis, a confessional approach to theology leads to "a certain lack of sympathy and empathy for the problems of contemporary society."⁴⁹ This is to say that a confessional approach focuses on promoting and preserving one's faith which leads to insensitivity towards other faiths and giving less attention to the problems in one's society. However, these negative views about confessional theology can be countered by the example of many Christian missionaries whose confessional theology did not hinder them from tackling the problems in their societies and promoting the wellbeing of all people and not just people in their churches.

Nonetheless, doing theology in an ecumenical manner indeed expresses the universality of the university by accommodating all denominations and all theological approaches. In a previous work, Kgatle demonstrated the ecumenical approach by calling for the integration of African Pentecostalism which he said was seriously excluded by the rationalistic approach to theology in public universities.⁵⁰ Kgatle has criticised theological education in public universities for being too rationalistic and failing to accommodate Pentecostalism which emphasises spiritual experience. He argued that the integration of African Pentecostalism into the curriculum of South African universities will assist in making theology relevant in South Africa by decolonising higher education on one hand and Africanising higher education on the other.⁵¹ However, as demonstrated by Nel and Resane, Kgatle's positivist view of university theology among Pentecostals is challenged by the Pentecostals' higher suspicion of religious programmes that emphasise the use of human logic instead of reliance on the Holy Spirit.⁵²

Nonetheless, the theological curriculum of a public university must be inclusive and be a public servant and not a denominational servant. Kgatle reinforces his stance by adding that "an approach to theological curriculum in a public university should maintain its scientific rigour as opposed to becoming a confessional one."⁵³ This means that instead of a parochial inward-looking, theology should be done dialogically with other church traditions and academic disciplines. However, one could respond to Kgatle by asking, why can confessional theology not be scientifically rigorous? A weakness of non-confessional and pluralistic theology is the lack of depth created by focusing on common elements while ignoring points of conflict which may have a deeper meaning than the commonly held elements.⁵⁴ One can also query the positivistic view that multiplicity represents a true instrument of measuring scientific rigour. Furthermore, ecumenism can also be criticized for stifling the depth of theological particularities by promoting a superfluous focus on surface commonalities.

b. The scientific interdisciplinary approach

A semblance of science can be seen in Kgatle's proposal for theology to be interdisciplinary and make sense to other disciplines. Calling for interdisciplinarity, Kgatle contends: "One of the radical approaches to saving theology in a public university is an interdisciplinary approach."⁵⁵ The call for interdisciplinarity is not too different from his ecumenical and religious pluralistic view because it places theology within the plurality of other academic disciplines. Just as theology should realise that there are many churches and many religions, it should also realise that there are many disciplines and operate within that framework. Kgatle compares the dearth and death of public university theology to the parochial inward focus within the theology. In other words, by remaining purely theological or biblical, theology is driving itself out of a public university curriculum that favours sciences and

⁴⁷ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 1.

⁴⁸ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 3.

⁴⁹ Buitendag and Simut, "Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation," 2.

⁵⁰ Mookgo S. Kgatle, "Integrating African Pentecostalism into the Theological Education of South African Universities: An Urgent Task," *HTS Theological Studies / Theological Studies* 74, no. 3 (August 9, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i3.5130>.

⁵¹ Kgatle, "Integrating African Pentecostalism into the Theological Education of South African Universities: An Urgent Task," 2.

⁵² Marius Nel, "Rather Spirit-Filled than Learned! Pentecostalism's Tradition of Anti-Intellectualism and Pentecostal Theological Scholarship," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37, no. 1 (March 31, 2016), 3. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v37i1.1533>.

⁵³ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 2.

⁵⁴ Simut, "Teaching Religion as Change for Social Transformation in Contemporary African and Non-African Universities: A South African Manifesto," 2.

⁵⁵ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 2.

evidence-based learning. It is not yet clear how Kgatle's interdisciplinary approach works, as he has not given any detailed example of an interdisciplinary theology curriculum design.⁵⁶ In an earlier study, Kgatle added to the suggestions made by Masenya and Masenya,⁵⁷ aspects he wished to be included in a theological curriculum for training Pentecostal pastors to avoid the recently reported abuses of religion among these pastors.⁵⁸ However, his interdisciplinary approach fundamentally entails "go[ing] beyond the theological disciplines"⁵⁹ and "address[ing] matters outside its precinct."⁶⁰ As he further explains, "an interdisciplinary approach to theological curriculum means that theology is studied beyond its conventional disciplines such as church history, systematic theology, biblical studies, missiology, and practical theology".⁶¹ He, however, insists that care must be taken to make sure that interdisciplinarity is "done without compromising the theological discourse".⁶² Therefore, it could mean designing theological or ethical modules for other disciplines such as economics and politics to name a few. It could also mean that instead of just focusing on religious subjects, the theological curriculum adds modules from other disciplines such as economics, politics, environment, and justice.⁶³ Such an interdisciplinary approach to theology, according to Kgatle, will not only enhance theology's scholarship, institutional influence and impact⁶⁴ but will also be an effective "tool to increase the number of students in undergraduate [theological] studies".⁶⁵ In other words, it means that the teaching of theological subjects will be extended to students in other disciplines instead of being limited to theology students. Kgatle believes that "there is a market of non-theological graduates who might be interested in theological studies".⁶⁶ One of the advantages of this approach is producing graduates who solve problems from a multi-dimensional perspective.

One can however say that Kgatle's interdisciplinary approach is not entirely new, but something that has been practiced in various forms by some public universities that allow theology students to pick courses from non-theological disciplines for their theology degrees. Furthermore, some universities give students the option of doing a Bachelor of Theology (BTh) programme fully concentrated with theology courses and a Bachelor of Arts (BA) that follow an interdisciplinary approach but with a major focus on theology. In theory, interdisciplinarity has always existed as one extended view on interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinarity could major in theology and choose another subject field like education, psychology and politics as a minor concentration, depending on their needs and competence. When the researcher studied for the Honours Bachelor of Theology in Theological Ethics at UNISA in 2007-2008, the program had five modules and students were permitted to do a minimum of three modules in theological ethics and a choice of two modules from other fields outside theology. However, the problem seems to lie in the lack of competent career guidance in universities and churches to assist students in appropriately structuring their curriculum in a way that empowers them for their particular socioeconomic contexts.

c. The humanist approach

Other theologians place the hope for the revival of theology in public universities on humanism. This is the idea that theology must prioritise the welfare of humanity. This approach is also secular in nature because it disputes the view that theology is the preserve of the church and seeks to make theology relevant outside Christianity and the church. An example of this approach can be seen in Buitendag

⁵⁶ Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, *African Pentecostal Theology: Modality, Disciplinarity, and Decoloniality* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), 117-132, See Kgatle's extended view on interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinarity.

⁵⁷ Madipoane Masenya and Madipoane Malesela, "Church Breakaways as a Prototype of Commercialisation and Commodification of Religion in the Pentecostal Church Movement in South Africa: Considering Curricula Offerings for Pastors," *STJ | Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 4, no. 2 (December 31, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2018.v4n2.a29>.

⁵⁸ M. S. Kgatle, "The Balance between Theory and Praxis in South African Pentecostalism: Patmos Bible School as a Model," *Acta Theologica* 31 (2021): 94.

⁵⁹ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 2.

⁶⁰ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 3.

⁶¹ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 3.

⁶² Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 3.

⁶³ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 3.

⁶⁴ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 2.

⁶⁵ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 2.

⁶⁶ Kgatle, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theological Studies in a Public University," 4.

and Simut who declare that theology in the public university “is for everybody: religious or non-religious, clergy or laity, specialists or non-specialists.”⁶⁷ Buitendag and Simut champion an open approach, that is not limited to Christians, because they believe theology has values that are sensible even to non-Christians and even people who practise no religion. They say:

*Contemporary societies need to understand that theology and religion are vital for the development of society not only because they help people interpret human life and the value of human existence, but they also provide men and women with ways to evaluate the dynamics of whatever happens in the world.*⁶⁸

In other words, for Buitendag and Simut, theology should be protected in public universities because it is a good source of ethical values that promote, protect and uphold life in this world. In this approach, Buitendag and Simut also express an ecumenical, religious pluralistic and interdisciplinary approach to theology in public universities. However, as already seen, for Buitendag and Simut, theology should never remain a preoccupation of the academic world but must become a public effort to engage in society as widely as possible, to address contextual problems such as poverty that is endemic in most African contexts.⁶⁹ By ‘public’ is expressed, in their view, that theology should be open to everyone religious or non-religious, clergy or laity, specialists or non-specialists. Therefore, instead of confessional theology, they espouse a form of humanist public theology. There is a sense that theology must be public by being non-religious but humanistic and promoting human wellbeing. Consequently, Buitendag and Simut motivate Ganzevoort’s idea that theology in the 21st century is no longer the prerogative of the church but an enterprise which must encompass the complete spectre of world religions. However, for them, while theology is no longer the preserve of the church, it must, nonetheless, “never lose sight of the church and specifically of all Christian churches”.⁷⁰ They are insistent that:

*While the distinction between Christianity and world religions must disappear in the academy for the sake of an inclusive and all-embracing theology, the reality of all Christian churches and their specific theologies must never be ignored or, even worse, forgotten.*⁷¹

In this statement, they espouse a secular humanist view of theology, that while allowing spiritual and confessional theology to exist, the priority is on the humanist approach. As seen in the above-quoted statement, the fundamental focus is that of humanising theology so that it enhances human wellbeing. As Buitendag and Simut state: “The purpose of theological education should be to promote the most fundamental of human values such as ‘dignity, equality, human rights and freedom’”.⁷² For them, theology in public universities must “become an instrument of social transformation for the significant improvement of human life throughout the world in as many local contexts as possible.”⁷³ From a conservative Christian perspective, this approach can be criticised for promoting anthropocentric theologising that places human beings at the centre instead of a theocentric approach that places God at the centre of theologising.

⁶⁷ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 2.

⁶⁸ Buitendag and Simut, “Ecology as Education in Tertiary Institutions. Teaching Theology and Religion in a Globalised World: African Perspectives,” 3.

⁶⁹ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 4.

⁷⁰ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 6.

⁷¹ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 6.

⁷² Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 7.

⁷³ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 8.

THE PROBLEMS OF THE SECULAR HUMANISTIC THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

An earlier section highlighted the observation that there are over 800 million followers of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, and it is estimated that by 2050 the number will increase to over one billion.⁷⁴ It also highlighted that over 85% of South Africa's population claims some form of association with Christianity. In essence, Christianity is growing exponentially, especially among the Independent and Pentecostal-type churches. However, there is a drastic decline of theology graduates/students/enrolments in public universities that is forcing theological faculties and departments to justify why they should not be closed or reduced in size. Therefore, theological activity of any form must take seriously this anomaly of the exponential growth of the church in Africa while theology is dying in public universities because it is happening amidst a great need for theological training to equip pastors to meet the growing need for competent church leaders. Although theology is declining in public universities, the need and hunger for theology remains high and growing among churches.

It is interesting that while Buitendag and Simut accept that theology is faced with the need to nurture Christianity's unprecedented growth⁷⁵, they still advocate for a humanist approach that makes the purpose of theological education the promotion of the most fundamental of human values such as dignity, equality, human rights and freedom instead of nurturing the faith of God's people – the church.⁷⁶ However, one can defend their stance by saying dignity, equality, human rights and freedom are expressions of true faith in God. For example, in Isaiah 58, God demands that true fasting and religious worship must encompass justice, human dignity, equality and human rights of the poor and powerless people. However, the problem with the humanist approach is that the welfare of humanity is prioritised while faith in God is marginalised, for the focus of theology is improved human societies instead of the worship of God. Indeed, while Buitendag and Simut affirm that theology in public universities should “never lose sight of the church and specifically of all Christian churches,”⁷⁷ they still agree with Ganzevoort's idea that theology in the 21st century is no longer the prerogative of the church but an enterprise which must encompass the complete spectre of world religions. This ultimately marginalizes the church with its spiritual agenda.

This secular humanist approach to theology has its own merits in the contemporary ‘God is dead’ era. However, the abandonment of well-resourced theological facilities in public universities by many Christians to seek theological training in poorly resourced Bible colleges and unregistered colleges means that these Christians do not find humanistic theology in public universities satisfying their spiritual needs. It further challenges public universities to, instead of prioritizing their secular humanist agendas, listen to the churches' need for theology that builds their faith in God and equips them to worship God. However, faith must be built with a critically informed God-centred theology that further equips the Christian to love and serve other human beings, even those outside their confessions and faith.

An important question that needs to be answered is: Will theology really attract a groundswell of enrolment if it abandoned its confessional element and became pluralist, scientific and humanist? That a highly scientific, religious pluralist and humanist approach to theological education will translate into huge student enrolment is contradicted by the many students who prefer to pursue theological studies outside the public universities. Indeed, as Kgatle points out, the decline in the numbers of theologically educated students in public universities “does not mean that there is no need for theology. It is a question of what type of theology the students need in their churches.”⁷⁸

If it is indeed true that it is the narrowness of theology that is driving away students from public universities, how can we then explain the many students that shy away from public universities to enrol

⁷⁴ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 2.

⁷⁵ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 2.

⁷⁶ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 7.

⁷⁷ Buitendag and Simut, “Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation,” 6.

⁷⁸ Kgatle, “The Balance between Theory and Praxis in South African Pentecostalism: Patmos Bible School as a Model,” 90.

in poorly resourced church-based theological institutions that offer only purely theological courses? One could say it is the cost of studying or the high entry requirements of studying at public institutions.

Nevertheless, can it really be true that many people who pursue their theological studies in church-based theological colleges lack the intellectual capacity and financial resources to study in a public university? Given that there are multiple advantages of studying at a public university such as an internationally accredited qualification, excellent learning facilities and an abundance of resources like the internet, library books, accredited journals, possibilities for bursaries and scholarships and many other resources that allow students to learn efficiently, how can we explain the many students who shun public universities and enrol at confessional bible colleges where learning resources are very scarce? How do we explain that some churches and denominations that used to send students to study theology in public universities have opted for the expensive and cumbersome route of seeking accreditation for their own programmes with the Council of High Education (CHE)? One will also be shocked to note the number of well-educated and professional people in universities who rely for their spiritual wellbeing on pastors without university qualifications but are considered very spiritual. There are many Christians who work in universities who pass the doors of the departments of theology to do their pastoral or ministerial training in church or unaccredited institutions that are considered spiritual and faithful to the Bible. These are realities that challenge the secular humanistic approach to theology.

Furthermore, the pluralist, scientific and humanist approaches are challenged by the many churches that strongly prefer graduates who have done their basic theological education in church-based Bible colleges and seminaries instead of public universities, when looking for pastors. Much of this preference is related to the stigma of public universities as liberal and anti-faith spaces that ground people only in critical thinking and kill faith in God. Many denominations prefer people who have done their foundational training in their denominational schools for doctrinal and pastoral basics.

A critical problem is the distance between the academy and the church. This is pointed out by Naidoo in her interview with Venter, when she said that in universities “there has been a great distance between the academy and the church, and that academic education is largely detached from concerns related to the faith commitment of the student.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, “academic staff at universities are hired for their areas of specialisation and not trained to facilitate formation or are unwilling to do so.”⁸⁰ This lack of spiritual formation creates a discomfiting gulf between the church and the academy by making theological education a cerebral reality that has little or no relevance to spiritual wellbeing.

As Knoetze points out, some denominations, especially Pentecostal and indigenous churches, are suspicious of theological training because they fear that the spirituality of their students will change if they are theologically trained.⁸¹ However, their fears are meritable because there are many students that were conservative and vibrant in their faith before they entered theological school but exited from university with a good academic qualification but a liberal and cold attitude towards the faith. This prevents many Christians from fearing the theological training offered at public universities and accredited theological institutions.⁸² The problem is that theology in public universities presents itself as not a custodian of faith but a custodian of liberalism that opposes and destroys faith and its heritage.

A further challenge with the humanist approach to theology is how decolonisation and Africanisation seem to attack the uniqueness of faith in Christ. Indeed, many African Christians agree that Christianity needs to be decolonised and contextualised in unique African contexts. However, some conservative Christians fear that this decolonisation and Africanisation process is performed in ways that dilute the unique truthfulness of the Christian gospel, and return them to the African traditional religious systems that tormented or proved inadequate for their spiritual needs, and they abandoned them for faith in Christ.

A critical issue that theology in public universities needs to address is why an ecumenical approach to theology should not be confessional, and why the confessional approach to theology

⁷⁹ Venter, “Interview–Prof. Marilyn Naidoo,” 4.

⁸⁰ Venter, “Interview–Prof. Marilyn Naidoo,” 4-5.

⁸¹ Knoetze, “Theological Education, Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development in Africa..,” 2.

⁸² Knoetze, “Theological Education, Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development in Africa..,” 2.

should not be critical. One would expect that there is a close relationship between confession and critical thinking so that faith is relevant to the realities surrounding the person of faith.

There is also the problem of treating theology as mere knowledge rather than of vocational training. Naidoo has highlighted the problem of the lack of spiritual transformation in theological education in public universities which hinders university graduates from translating their theological knowledge into effective church ministry. According to Knoetze, many churches in Africa criticise universities and seminaries for “produc[ing] well-skilled ‘theologians’ but are clueless when it comes to congregational ministry.”⁸³ These graduates know the scientific facts but are vocationally inadequate. While they know the science of interpreting the Bible they cannot preach and counsel people. This leads churches to end up preferring graduates from uncredited institutions because, while they may not be sufficiently skilled, at least, it is believed, their heart is in the right place in God.

CONCLUSION

Theological education in public universities faces with challenges that threaten to drive it to extinction from the public academy. However, one wonders whether pluralist, scientific and humanist approaches will save theology’s place in the public universities. Nevertheless, the exponential growth of Christianity in the global south, and in South Africa in particular, means that there is hope for not only the survival of theology but also its resurgence. If Christian theology, is primarily the church’s articulation of the implications of its faith in God concerning the relationship with God, humanity and the world, it then means that as long as the church lives, theology will live. Therefore, public universities need to be challenged to realise that the exclusion or marginalisation of the church in theology will lead the church to rely on unregulated theological sources for its survival. Therefore, public universities are challenged not only to seek creative ways of allowing theology to thrive in universities but also to operate in ways that win the trust of churches that are the primary consumers of theology to entrust them with their students for theological training. Furthermore, the exclusion of the church from public universities will hinder the quest for the Africanisation of theology at grassroots levels because the South African churches that are serious about their confessional theological positions will end up sending their students to foreign theological institutions such as American theological seminaries and in the process create a vacuum for recolonisation and neocolonialism. Finally, churches are called to play an active role in rescuing theology in public universities by actively influencing theological developments in universities by sending students to training in universities. This will give the churches, the power to influence the curriculum as stakeholders and the direct recipients of training in universities.

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⁸³ Knoetze, “Theological Education, Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development in Africa..,” 2.

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