



The University of Western Cape Project on Ecclesiology and Ethics

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Introduction: Becoming UWC

In its simplest terms, the tension between ecclesiology and ethics is between what the church is and what it does, between what it is supposed to be and what it is supposed to do, between what it believes about itself and how it acts. Allowing for a degree of abstraction, this tension is not unique to the church although it gains a certain theological depth given the tension between the theological and the sociological dimensions of the church. In a secularized form, this is the tension between movement and institutionalization, between the vision of an institution and what it actually accomplishes. This is true of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in a quite remarkable way.

One may say that the “UWC project on ecclesiology and ethics” commenced with the charter that established the university in the first place. This charter was based on the system of race classification that prevailed at that time. According to the Verwoerdian vision, every population group in South Africa had to have its own university so that each could develop its own potential. The university was at first under the firm control of academics who were notoriously regarded as “Kleurlingkenners” (those who know “coloureds”) but eventually rejected the basis upon which it was founded. It finally opened its door to people irrespective of race classification. The rest, as they say, is history. There is no need to tell that history, but it may be captured in dramatic shifts from a “university for Coloureds” to an institution deeply embedded in the struggle against apartheid, to “the intellectual home of the left” (1980s), to a maieutic role in the transition to democracy (1990–1994), to a struggling university (1995–2000), to a “place of quality, a place to grow” (2001–) and to being one of the leading universities on the African continent.

Two comments on this history are important here:

Firstly, the identity of the university cannot be restricted to any one of these phases. It certainly cannot be found in its early origins. No one would wish to actually return to the heroic days of the struggle in 1976. Being the intellectual home of the left may have been appropriate for the 1980s but constant repositioning is necessary given ideological shifts that are taking place. The most apt description of the identity of UWC is captured in the phrase “becoming UWC,” which is also the title chosen for a book on UWC’s story. As Lalu and Murray observe, “Becoming UWC is not merely a project of recall or nostalgia.

a movement to resist strategies of exclusion and stigmatization and to ensure equal access to medical and other services to any marginalized group.¹⁵

The Pentecostal movement and the ecumenical movement in Africa (30 May 2014)

This one-day conference recognized that Pentecostal and independent churches together constitute roughly one half of Christianity in South Africa, with so-called mainline churches (see above) constituting the other half. There seems to be some resistance in Pentecostal churches (with some notable exceptions) to be co-opted in any form of ecumenical fellowship given the historic reasons why they broke away from such mainline churches in the first place. How, then, is the relationship between the ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement to be understood? This question was explored with reference to six core ecumenical themes, namely unity, Faith and Order, social responsibility, education, worship, and mission.

African notions of ethical leadership (2 December 2014)

This event was structured in the form of a public lecture by Christo Lombard under the auspices of the launching of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society. The paper on “Desmond Tutu’s Style of Ethical Leadership” explored notions of moral formation and ethical leadership with specific reference to Tutu’s inimitable style of leadership.¹⁶

Ongoing Projects

As indicated above, the conference on the state of ecumenical theology in Africa is to provide the culmination of the UWC project on ecclesiology and ethics. However, this is necessarily an ongoing project given the current research projects of its postgraduate students. These include a current project by Demaine Solomons on South African discourses on reconciliation, by Lerato Kobe on Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu’s notions of reconciliation, by Rochelle Davids on the aims of South Africa’s *National Development Plan*, by Mbhekeni Nkosi on Economic Inequalities and Restitution, by Rethabile Leanya on the concept of “Dead aid,” and by Teddy Sakupapa on Ecclesiology and Ethics in the context of the All Africa Conference of Churches 1963–2013. These are merely samples of what is indeed an ongoing UWC project on ecclesiology and ethics.

¹⁵ See Ernst M. Conradie and Miranda N. Pillay, eds., *Ecclesial Reform and Deform Movements in the South African Context* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2015).

¹⁶ See Christo Lombard, “Desmond Tutu’s Style of Ethical Leadership,” paper presented at the launch of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society, University of the Western Cape, 2 December 2014.