

RESEARCH AT THE INSTITUTE FOR THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH,
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA (UNISA)

W S VORSTER

Since its establishment as a centre for advanced research in Theology during 1975, a number of research projects have been undertaken and several symposia have been held under the auspices of the Institute. In this short review on current research at the Institute I wish to draw attention to some of its more important activities.

Although it is an independent unit, research at the Institute is done in close co-operation with the Faculty of Divinity at Unisa. Members of Faculty are normally appointed as project leaders but it is in principle also possible to appoint anyone from outside the University in such a capacity, as is the case with the *South African Theological Bibliography*. Projects are undertaken in view of present needs and have to be approved by the Management Committee of the Institute as well as by the Council of the University. Present activities include the following.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Methodology of New Testament Research

Project leader : Prof W S Vorster

Assistant Researchers : Mrs J Kilian (permanent) and

Mr J van der Westhuizen (temporary)

This project includes both research on methodology of New Testament Scholarship as well as the development of a comprehensive information retrieval system. In the first instance, interest is mainly focussed on problems of interpretation and especially on the relationship between what may be called historical methods of interpretation and immanent methods of interpretation. Results have been released in the form of publications and papers read at the annual meetings of the Old and New Testament Societies of South Africa. At present research is being done on the literary *Gattung* 'gospel' in view of an analysis of the Gospel of Mark. The project is, however, much more comprehensive and as it was said, also includes an information retrieval system.

In spite of the large number of indexing tools at present available,

the search for relevant material from periodicals and books on any topic of research in any library is a difficult and time-consuming undertaking. For this reason information retrieval systems are very much in demand and this is universally realised. In order to provide students, research fellows, lecturers and other scholars with current periodical material on subjects of their own interest, an information retrieval system for the New Testament has been developed at the Institute. At present the system includes more than 10,000 entries from the most important New Testament periodicals. It covers a very wide range of research articles on New Testament Studies and related fields and is based on information drawn from the internationally known periodical *New Testament Abstracts*.

A thesaurus (authority list of terms) has been developed, comprising approximately 10,000 entries arranged alphabetically according to semantic hierarchical relationships. The tool is used both for indexing periodical material and also for retrieving stored material by leading the indexer and the retriever to the descriptor used in our system. Bibliographical data is stored in a Jonker Termatrix system. With the aid of this system it is possible to retrieve information on request on any given subject of New Testament Studies appearing in *New Testament Abstracts* without effort and waste of time. During the first six months of this year 25 searches have been done for people working in the field of New Testament Scholarship.

A further development of the project is the development of a subject index to *New Testament Abstracts*. *NTA* is a very valuable tool but due to the lack of a subject index, it is very often frustrating to find entries on specific subjects. In view of the fact that all the entries in *NTA* are in any event worked through systematically for purposes of indexing the material, it was decided to start preparing subject indices to *NTA*. These would enable the individual user of *NTA* to find subjects of interest easier without the frustration of paging through complete volumes of abstract material. By the end of November 1978 a draft index to volume 20 of *NTA* was completed and subjected to criticism by a panel of critics abroad. Criticism received was mostly positive and useful. In view of this, it was decided to continue with indices to volumes 21-23. Possible interest in the index is now being investigated in order to have it published if users of *NTA* find it useful and necessary.

Old Testament Information Retrieval Project

Project leader: Prof. F E Deist

Assistant Researcher: Miss H Fourie

The Old Testament information retrieval project was started at the end of 1977. By this time the New Testament project was well on its way and prof. Deist and his assistant had the advantage of learning from the experience gained by the developers of this project. The Old Testament project has the same aim as its New Testament counterpart. In view of this a thesaurus had to be developed and indexing of abstract material had to be done. By starting the project at that time the Old Testament project had a very important advantage since the first issue of *Old Testament Abstracts (OTA)* appeared at the beginning of 1978. It is therefore possible to index each issue as it appears and add descriptors to the thesaurus as literary warrant demands. It was, however, decided to index material from the *Internationale Zeitschriften-schau für Bibelwissenschaft und Grenzgebieten (IZBG)* on Old Testament and related fields simultaneously. The information will also be stored in the Termatrix system and like the New Testament system the Old Testament project will provide students and scholars with information from periodical literature from these two sources at request. In both these projects help is received from members of the department of Old and New Testament Studies at Unisa as far as indexing is concerned.

Missiology Project

Project leader: Prof. D J Bosch

Assistant researchers (temporary): Mr. D Potgieter, Rev. I Carrick and
Rev. J N Kritzinger.

Abstracting tools play a very important role in current research. The only abstracting tool in Missiology in existence is the periodical *Missionalia*, published in South Africa (ed. D J Bosch). At present most of the abstracts from scientific literature on Missiology are prepared by the Institute. The periodical has approximately 750 subscribers from all over the globe and missiologists and theologians from many parts of the world are making use of the results of this project.

Church History Project

Project leaders: Prof J A A Stoop and Dr J W Hofmeyr
 Assistant Researcher (temporary): Miss C Landman

The project involves the compilation of a bibliography of church history of Africa South of the Sahara. It is intended to provide a comprehensive bibliography of church history first in Southern Africa (including South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe) from the beginnings to the present, and eventually to extend it to other areas. It will include books, monographs, articles from periodicals and theses and will cover all churches and denominations. It will be a very valuable contribution in a field where tools like the intended bibliography are more or less non-existent. The first volume of the bibliography will be published in the near future.

Biblical Archaeology Project

Project leader: Prof I H Eybers

In co-operation with the University of Tel Aviv (Israel), staff members and students of Unisa and also of the University of Pretoria interested in Biblical Archaeology partook in four archaeological excavations at ancient biblical Lachish during the period 1976-80. The importance of Lachish and the Lachish excavation under the leadership of Dr D Ushisskin of the University of Tel Aviv need not be stressed. Apart from the knowledge gained through participation in the excavation, students were taken to the most important archaeological sites in the whole of Israel.

Since Unisa sponsored part of the excavation during the above-mentioned period and in return received a number of artefacts found during excavations at Lachish and elsewhere, it is intended to start an archaeological museum at Unisa. There has however been a delay in the preparation of finds for distribution and only part of the artefacts to which the Institute is entitled have been received. To expand the collection a number of artefacts has recently been purchased. For teaching purposes the artefacts will be described and arranged, sherds displayed and photographs prepared. The Institute already has a collection of slides and other material which will also be used in the museum.

South African Theological Bibliography Project

Project leader: Prof C F A Borcharadt (University of Pretoria)
 Messrs W Coetzer, M van Tonder and E Jooste assisted
 in collecting material for this project.

During the past three years material has been collected to compile a bibliography on South African theological literature. The bibliography includes articles and theses on all aspects of theology and related fields published by all denominations in South Africa in both Afrikaans and English. The initial volume will be updated by biennial supplements.

The first volume has recently been published under the title *South African Theological Bibliography*. It comprises more than 6 000 entries, subdivided into main sections. The entries are numbered, and in addition to a very comprehensive table of contents, the volume also contains an alphabetical author index. All headings and clarifying detail are given in both Afrikaans and English.

This is to my mind a very important tool. It will serve as a barometer for South African theological scholarship. It is clear that much of the work being done in South Africa in terms of theology is not only often superficial but also peripheral. From this index it becomes clear what South African theologians believe and what they fear. The problem of the Pentateuch, for instance, has not been touched upon. The same applies to the Synoptic problem, not to speak of the problem of the historical Jesus. The user will undoubtedly get insight into the thought climate of South African scholarship and one hopes that this bibliography will encourage young scholars to get involved in serious theological study.

Ecumenical Project

Like the Faculty, the Institute is ecumenical in character and it is therefore natural to undertake an ecumenical project. Prof A König is at present working out the framework of a project on baptism within an ecumenical context. Stress will be laid on the practice and not on the preaching of baptism within modern society. The idea is to establish a workshop where representatives of denominations with diverging views on baptism can meet and discuss problems in connection with baptism.

Although each of these projects is conducted by a project leader, the work is co-ordinated by the director of the Institute. In addition to these projects an annual symposium is organised during September.

SYMPOSIA

In South Africa there is a great need for a forum where theologians from various denominations can freely and frankly express their views. In order to create such a forum, it was decided to hold a symposium once a year on an important issue.

The first symposium was held in September 1977 on the theme *Church and Society*. The Committee responsible for the arrangements had in mind to invite a small number of selected theologians. Invitations were extended and it turned out that there was such an interest that the committee had to change its mind. In the end just over 70 persons from all over the country, and even from Zimbabwe attended the meeting. Papers were read in both Afrikaans and English and discussions were conducted in both languages. The papers have been published in a volume entitled *Church and Society/Kerk en Samelewing* (ed W S Vorster).

In 1978 a second symposium was held. If the first proved to be a success, it was even more the case with the second symposium. The theme was a very important one. Since the Bible has a very high status in the country, 'Scripture and the use of Scripture' was a good choice. We again invited speakers from different backgrounds and points of view to partake in the symposium and also invited people in advance to respond to these papers. A respondent opened the discussion of the paper read and this arrangement caused a lively debate. Both papers and responses were read in English. The papers were also published by Unisa in a volume of which the complete manuscript was prepared at the Institute by its personnel. It is entitled *Scripture and the Use of Scripture* (ed W S Vorster) and was dedicated to prof Ben J Marais on the occasion of his seventieth birthday.

A third symposium was held in September 1979. The theme was 'Church unity and diversity in the Southern African Society' which seemed a very important issue for our day. This volume is at present in print. This year's symposium has the theme 'The Spirit in Biblical Perspective' and will once again be held in September. The papers and responses will be ready in published form when the seminar takes place.

The above-mentioned publications and others prepared by the Institute are available from the *Central Sales Department of Unisa*, P O Box 392, Pretoria, 0001.

- 1 *'n Ou Boek in 'n nuwe wêreld - gedagtes rondom die interpretasie van die Nuwe Testament* - W S Vorster
- 2 *Church and Society/Kerk en samelewing* - W S Vorster (ed.)
- 3 *Scripture and the Use of Scripture* - W S Vorster (ed.)
- 4 *Aischynomai en stamverwante woorde in die Nuwe Testament* - W S Vorster
- 5 *South African Theological Bibliography/Suid-Afrikaanse Teologiese Bibliografie* - C F A Borchardt & W S Vorster (eds.)
- 6 *Church unity and diversity in the Southern African context* - W S Vorster (ed.)
- 7 *The Holy Spirit in Biblical perspective* - W S Vorster (ed.)