

**NEW WIND IN OUR SAILS
A TIDE FOR TURNING, A TIME OF HOPE**

Bénédicte Lemmelijn

*"You may say I'm a dreamer,
But I'm not the only one ...".
John Lennon*

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I. A 'VISION' OR A 'VISION'

Writing a 'vision text' is actually not such a simple matter. For me, it is about bringing together numerous reflections I have made in the course of two decades in my diverse experience in many different and changing tasks in faculty service and administration, about bringing together a diversity of experience in what was good and what could be better, and about outlining a trajectory that acknowledges learning from the past, but above all dares to explore and embrace new trajectories.

1. A 'kairos' for our faculty

Our faculty is going through an important period of transition: many colleagues are retiring, the generation to which I belong as one of the youngest is gradually moving on, but a remarkable new generation is emerging. In recent years, our faculty has welcomed a large and still growing group of highly competent colleagues: from among our own former students, but also from entirely different international backgrounds: people who work very hard – sometimes too hard – who have had to meet the highest imaginable requirements and who enrich the faculty from new and different contexts that can be learned from. A sound policy is not about merely informing people, if even that is realised; it is not about simply telling how things 'happen to us'. On the contrary, there is a need for a new dialogue and an honest questioning of the faculty reality, based on everyday diversity and new justified sensitivities and concerns. The moment we find ourselves in is, to put it biblically, a 'kairos', the most appropriate and favourable moment to listen to a critical view on our functioning, to allow new visions and to actually dare to embrace new trajectories.

A tide for turning, a time of hope. Hope is sometimes called the little sister of faith and love. And yet, it is a deep reality that is truly transformative. Hope holds promise and awakens life and enthusiasm. It is the opposite of despondency. Hope is about looking forward to a new future, about longing for a new perspective. It is not a passive waiting, but an active and confident attempt to give form to what is dreamed of, in the realisation of a genuine 'vision' that becomes a realistic 'vision', and a vision that becomes a policy.

2. A vision text is not a policy plan

A vision text is not a policy plan. A policy plan draws the concrete lines of a vision. And above all, it must be prepared with the active participation of an entire team, not imposed by one person. Moreover, it rightly requires the approval of the entire faculty. This text, therefore, does not pretend to be a finished policy plan. That will be proposed, based on a number of ideas and insights already clearly conceptualised, at the beginning of a possible mandate and after intensive consultation. What we have here, however, is the honest reflection of a vision, indeed something close once again to the biblical 'vision' perhaps: it expresses the fundamental direction that I 'see' for the faculty: with confidence and courage, and in a new way.

3. A different kind of leadership

In a faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, leadership, even if it concerns the concrete reality of every day, with all its ups and downs, that demand choices and decisions, may also be formulated against the background of what/Who carries and drives us. In the biblical as well as in the monastic Benedictine tradition – and carrying my name has not been hazardous – for me, it is about three things.

In the first place, it is about ‘listening’: being present and analysing while listening. Secondly, humility: not wanting to ‘rule’ but actually to ‘serve’ in function of creating development opportunities for whom one is responsible; not standing in the centre, but putting the greater good and the broader perspective first. And thirdly, not only rational intelligence, but also social and emotional intelligence is needed: allowing oneself to be touched, in compassion and gentleness, by the people and tasks entrusted to us. Against this background, ‘serving leadership’ may also serve as an inspiration. And above all, it will become ‘leading’ that is realised in a team context: in consultation, in serious and actual delegation, in proactive coaching, in honest critical evaluation and positive constructive remedy, and all of this from an *a priori* of fundamental trust, and by no means of suspicion, control or distrust.

The support of leaders in their team, therefore, includes, as we read in Sirach, the need to be surrounded by ‘strong counsellors’. The team that I envisage as a possible dean will therefore be characterised by polyphony and diversity in strong personalities, which may sometimes make consultation more difficult and require more intensive dialogue on the one hand, but in which, on the other hand, more representative and more supported decision-making can be achieved.

Understood in this way, I hope to realise – or at least to practise to the best of my ability – a leadership that is not characterised by hierarchically determined processes and structures that rely on power or fear, but is realised rather in four important steps:

- 1) receptive observation and open-minded listening,
- 2) broad and intense participatory analysis and decision-making,
- 3) acting truthfully, authentically and with integrity, and
- 4) transparent communication

II. SOME FUNDAMENTAL OPTIONS

1. A new reality – an adequate response

At a time when our older generation of professors is retiring and the middle generation has been active in management for years, a new reality is emerging in a very remarkable way. There is an important generation who, up to now, has not been able to strongly participate in governance under the previously applicable rules, but who *de facto* carry the faculty reality to a large extent. These people have much to teach the faculty. They can enrich our context in a participatory way, on the basis of day-to-day diversity and new justified sensitivities and concerns. In that context, it is not appropriate to simply confirm old habits and presuppositions for them, to maintain without question a status quo of unwritten rules and implicit expectations that can hardly ever be met, or at least that feeling is created.

What is needed in this new context, and for each faculty subdivision, is a clear, broadly supported policy with open and transparent communication, and this at the level of tasks and expectations, at the level of criteria in the division of labour *and* in assessment thereof, at the level of service provision on a faculty, university or external level, and on a human and social level (encouraging praise and sharing of important achievements, creating a sense of joint pride, sharing human joy and suffering, naming struggles and efforts...).

2. A new culture - an a priori of trust

Our time speaks of a '*sense of belonging*', which is not created by control over more obligatory presence on the ground, but by intrinsic commitment to a common project, creating and nurturing the feeling of being part of a larger perspective to be pursued, speaking without question in 'we' and 'us': together in 'our' project, the great project we call 'our faculty', which we want to carry, maintain and stimulate.

Another term worth mentioning in this context is the idea of '*ownership*'. This is about literally 'owning' our lives, our project, our faculty. From a real experienced responsibility that grows out of intrinsic motivation, that comes about in a context in which justice and righteousness, reliability and reciprocity are not empty words, in a context in which values are realised by people who are of value and also feel valued. And this in a reality in which each of us does something that matters, each with his or her own knowledge and competences, talents, sensitivities and (if desired, also varying) emphases, in responsibility for and involvement in the whole that matters to us all.

In order to realise this reality, a positive culture is needed for everyone, in all ranks and without distinction, which is based on an absolute *a priori* trust. A climate of encouragement and affirmation, of a hopeful perspective of progress, but also of satisfaction with what has already been and is being done. A culture that is in everything the opposite of the suspicion in the unspoken but ceaselessly demanding echo of ever more and never enough. And all this in an attitude of mutual respect in 'magnanimity', which is not coincidentally also the linguistic opposite of 'pettiness'. There is absolutely nothing great about making oneself great by pulling others down, making them small or keeping them small ...

3. Respecting and promoting balance

Our faculty is staffed by very valuable people, each of whom is very committed to their own way of working, in their own tasks and responsibilities. This commitment and passion may and should be confirmed and praised. At the same time, we are all 'people', and it does not have to be a taboo to talk about things other than our work and projects. We can talk about what we did in our spare time, what interesting things we saw or experienced and we can share our worries. It is allowed to answer without hesitation that we cannot attend a meeting, simply because children need to be picked up; no other excuse or white lie is needed. It should become perfectly normal for someone to say that they choose to digitally 'de-connect' at the weekend or in the evening.

We may work hard and very hard, and those who want to may even work harder, but we must not lose sight of one great good, namely the supreme good of our inner freedom. It is everyone's right to make their own (life) choices. More than that, it is even a characteristic of true humanity to consciously and purposefully seek to maintain a balance in life. *Ora et labora*, says the Benedictine rule: in balance. Drive and passion are wonderful and can accomplish great things, but they must not become slavery or addiction. At our faculty, people are allowed to become more human in and through their work, not less ...

4. Last but not least: A safe and secure working environment

It needs neither argument nor much explanation when I state that in the current social context, we are gaining worldwide attention for any form of transgressive behaviour. We have come to realise that all

human beings have the right to exist and develop in their own individuality and, even more, the right to lead a life in a safe, existentially secure context. These are two aspects in one sentence.

First of all, it is about an individuality, in whatever sense, that must be respected and valued in the awareness that diversity is enriching and not threatening. The almost natural tendency of people, often out of misunderstood self-identity, to put other people in categories and ‘pigeonholes’, be it race, origin or gender, is limiting and often caricatural. So, let us as a faculty appreciate and embrace every alterity, every diversity that contributes to the multicoloured and pre-eminently international character of our faculty.

In addition, the need for a safe and existentially secure context is addressed. For too long, too many behaviours or words, too many variations in attitude and tone, have been considered ‘normal’ or ‘not so bad’, hushed up, covered up or at best trivialised. It is of the utmost importance to realise that people have different sensitivities, and that even without malicious intent, certain comments or a certain tone of speech can touch, harm or even break people in their individuality. Open, transparent, unambiguous and constructive communication in an appreciative and encouraging tone makes so much more possible and effectively creates a safe and secure environment, in which people can and can dare be themselves and can do their work in their own way with their own qualities and talents.

In our university and faculty, likewise, the aspects described above are unfortunately still a sore point. An aspect we should not gloss over, but face up to. And no, it is not always about sexual transgression, although we are not completely free from that either, but often about a shortcoming in the direction I described above. Let us evaluate this critically and remedy it constructively. Let’s create more and more awareness, and promote a proper follow-up and an effective policy.

III. CONCRETISATION: ACTIVE, PARTICIPATIVE AND EFFICIENT GOVERNANCE IN REAL POLYPHONY

Against the background described above, I would like to concretise the associated endeavours, however – and I emphasise this once again – after thorough consultation with my future team, in a number of policy options in the functioning of the various bodies and subdivisions of our faculty, which are only explored here.

1. The Faculty Board and the Faculty Council: from ‘information’ to ‘active participation’

a. The Faculty Council

An impression I have gained over the years, in my varying tasks of service and administration (see below), is that many of our bodies are primarily and often *de facto* almost purely ‘informative’. There is a Faculty Board (FB), which distils a core board of three vice deans, in which issues are discussed with the dean. These issues are explored and discussed in the entire Faculty Board, then go through the relevant bodies, come back to the Faculty Board and are then put on the agenda for the Faculty Council (FR), where in principle discussion and approval should follow, but where often again mainly information is given, without or at least with too little active participation in policy and approach.

The result of this process is that the FR (and by extension the ZAP evenings) are becoming far too much like ‘information meetings’, in that genuine and thorough notification of processes and decisions has often already been made *de facto*. Of course, it is absolutely necessary that policy development goes through the various forums and is only then communicated or submitted for approval. However, the FR must also, and in fact primarily, be a body in which the entire representation of all sections of the

faculty must have a 'stake' in that policy. It should not remain 'top down' information from the FB. Rather, we must turn the matter around.

The FR must raise issues that are of concern to all members of the FTRW. Concerns should be communicated. Issues that should be followed up in the experience and perception of members of our faculty may be brought forward. Initiatives that should be taken may be proposed. In other words, the approach is from the FR to the FB: from idea and concern in the FR to follow-up and implementation in the FB, with feedback to the FR afterwards. A circle of shared policy is thus created, in reflection and action, between the FR and the FB.

b. The Faculty Board

In order to optimally realise the aspects of 1) receptive observation and open-minded listening, 2) broad and intense participatory analysis and decision-making, 3) acting truthfully, authentically and with integrity, and 4) transparent communication (cf. sub I above), I aim for greater and broader participation, also within the FB in case of election.

First of all, I plan the development of a team around each vice dean in the respective fields of education, research and internationalisation. Furthermore, in order to increase efficiency and reduce the burden of meetings, I want to review the pace or rhythm of the planned meetings. And finally, I intend to have more in-depth consultations with each individual group, both at the level of content areas and at the level of the different representations in the FB, with a view to listening to, detecting and discussing specific concerns and agenda items.

The dean herself, in exercising her mandate, also aims at a serious delegation of responsibilities both in policy development and in implementation and action, as well as in her representation.

In the same context, I propose to decentralise the various tasks or 'portfolio' of the vice-deans that have been accumulating over the years, and to entrust certain aspects, which require their own attention and expertise, to separate responsible ZAP members. One aspect in this context is, for instance, a respective contact point as 'liaison' between the faculty and the various religions and philosophies in Flanders. Another aspect concerns special and targeted attention to PR, media, recruitment, science communication and relations *ad extra*. Other important points are adequate ICT support or diversity. Finally, the operation of and reflection on the organisation of our RZL programmes also deserves a specific approach, which does not necessarily have to be done solely by, albeit in consultation with, the vice-dean for education's team. Similarly, there are aspects within research and internationalisation that can be supported by different people.

Furthermore, and finally, I am considering, as on a city council, opening up the meetings of the full FB to interested observers. In addition, for the sake of direct and personal contact, I foresee a weekly consultation hour for open discussion with the dean (in addition to appointments that can of course be made at any other available time).

c. The respective bodies

In the context described above, each of the three vice-dean's teams has its own participatory faculty body. For Education, this is obviously the Teaching Committee (POC), which I would like to organise again on a faculty basis with equal attention to the various programmes at our faculty. For Research, there is the Research and Doctoral Commission (ODC). And for Internationalisation, the Advisory Committee for International Students (ACIS) will be re-established. I refer here to the initiative I took earlier as vice dean for internationalisation, which is still present on the website – https://theo.kuleuven.be/en/international-affairs/Advisory_Committee - and which was perceived as

a particularly successful pioneer of its kind at KU Leuven. In each of these three bodies, ZAP, ABAP, ATP and students are represented in order to guarantee the broadest possible and at the same time efficient participation in our policy.

2. A supportive and empowered ATP community

In terms of administrative and technical support, our faculty is blessed with a staff who provides all forms of support with almost boundless and tireless enthusiasm. However, that support must itself be supported.

In recent years, due to all kinds of circumstances and situations, a lot of 'short-term' solutions have been implemented, pieces of the puzzle have been put together and shifted again, chunks have been added or glued together, and unfortunately this has sometimes happened without sufficient mutual consultation and with too little direct and transparent communication. More consultation is needed in this area. Systematically checking which tasks there are and must be carried out and who is doing what at the moment is a first indispensable matter. However, in addition, serious attention must be paid to the rich diversity of talents and capacities that the ATP employees have. Is everyone in the right place? Can work be (re)distributed, not purely on the basis of more pragmatic efficiency (which will be the result anyway), but mainly on the basis of the individuality and preferences of those involved. Reconsidering the role of working at home, in everyone's situation, is a concrete example of this. And here, too, the promotion of a positive climate of human involvement must be reinforced in clear communication, and where desirable, also in the sharing of joys and sorrows and in bearing each other's presence and existence.

3. The ABAP section: apprentice and master at the same time

Our faculty is also largely supported by the multiple and multifaceted efforts of our ABAP auxiliary staff. We therefore have a wealth of intellectual potential and a great deal of good will in people who, with young and strong enthusiasm and genuine ambition, carry out research and support and help to guarantee both the teaching and the services of our faculty. The willingness with which they take on many and varied tasks is great. This is a first fact that we should acknowledge more sharply and consciously, and also appreciate and welcome.

However, their position is not always easy. Unfortunately, one often sees unbalanced relationships developing in a power dynamic (sometimes left or often unconscious). Against the many tasks they perform, there are also rights, which are not always respected. In a culture of 'ownership', which I mentioned above, each person involved is more strongly connected if the organisation, in our case the faculty, also creates added value for the individual. In the case of the ABAP, this is, in the first place, thorough, serious and committed guidance and dialogue about the research to be carried out. But also in the context of their service and assisting or substitute teaching tasks, a win situation has to be created: not only on the side of the supported ZAP member, but also on the side of the supporting ABAP member. For example, substitute or assistant teaching may/must be accompanied by supervision and training. Tasks that are entrusted to them should ideally have a component of acquiring or strengthening transferable skills, which should preferably also be made explicit. Tasks that are carried out must also receive recognition. And this whole process requires on both sides, both the coaching ZAP member and the supporting ABAP member, an honest attitude of mutual commitment and responsibility, or 'accountability' if you will. Finally, the pressing question of the future facing this section must also be taken seriously. It must be possible to discuss concerns, including directly with the dean, in an open dialogue at the very least.

4. The students

Students form an obvious but special group at our faculty. The current generation of students explicitly chooses a less obvious field of study, yet at a world-renowned faculty that can rightly be proud of its achievements. The value and quality of a degree, which our faculty wishes to continue to guarantee in the current social context, can and must continue to instil pride in students. It is therefore a necessity for students and future students that we emphasise the special character of our faculty both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Not to remain shy in the background or on the side-lines, but to continue to claim our place with fitting pride, within the university, in society, in the church and in other contexts of philosophical meaning. Moreover, in this whole process, the active and serious participation of students is also crucial, in all aspects that concern the good functioning of our faculty.

At the same time, it is very important for this unique faculty, and *a fortiori* in the difficult Corona times that we have (hopefully) largely put behind us, to be able to experience and develop a 'sense of belonging' (see *supra*) just like all other faculty members. In this context, which has been a concern for years, extra attention is needed for the integration of students in the Dutch and English language programmes. To this end, and in particular with a view to integration and welfare, a Dutch-speaking delegation may again attend the meetings of a revived Advisory Committee for International Students (ACIS), where international students are represented by delegates from the respective parts of the world (with their own explicit and respected sensitivities and values), as was the case under my previous tenure as vice-dean for internationalisation and which bore very good fruit. From there, joint activities can again be stimulated and facilitated.

Finally, proper reflection – and above all action – is certainly needed in the optimisation and maintenance of a suitable and convivial meeting space.

5. Internationalisation

In line with my aforementioned tenure as vice-dean for internationalisation, for me 'internationalisation' is not only a crucial, but also a leading aspect within KU Leuven and worldwide. Our faculty already celebrated (during the same term) fifty years of international programmes in 2018 (<https://theo.kuleuven.be/en/50-years-theology-programmes>), at a time when KU Leuven as a whole also started to place more emphasis on 'truly international'. It is therefore of the utmost importance for our faculty to take this internationalisation seriously, to develop it further to a growing but well-considered extent, and to emphasise its pioneering role therein.

In my five years as vice-dean for internationalisation, a great deal was realised in a number of initiatives and cooperation agreements which now – after the difficult period of Corona in which internationalisation was forced into a different rhythm – have to be taken up again, reconsidered and further developed. There are many possibilities for cooperation, but in my opinion it is important to select partners from two different perspectives. On the one hand, it is important to work with strong academic partners when it comes to, for example, joint degrees or even joint Erasmus programmes. On the other hand, it is a task of our faculty, in service to the world church and in an explicit option for the poor and weak, to also make cooperation possible with partners in the Global South. For them, cooperation with us – however this may be interpreted in various ways – means a springboard to greater appreciation and impact in their region.

In this internationalisation, I would like – without any obligation of course – to involve all sections of the entire faculty: ZAP and ABAP staff who can teach or explain research, ATP staff who can teach and illustrate their way of working, students who broaden their horizons in exchange and return enriched. In this context, the online opportunities that have grown in importance and have become familiar offer

additional and new opportunities. And of course, receiving foreign colleagues *vice versa* adds intrinsic value. In addition, there are numerous university opportunities that are not sufficiently known: research stays, conferences, expert seminars, joint courses, internships even after graduation (mobility for all), and of course all possibilities within the Erasmus framework. A transparent and clear communication about this should benefit all members of our faculty and enthruse them to actually participate.

Finally, in these and other contexts, direct and clear consultation with the various bodies of the university and the rectorate is desirable in an atmosphere of mutual openness and trust. As far as I am concerned, there is no need to think in terms of 'us' and 'them'. Dialogue must be possible without too many barriers. And that is a reality that I have initiated myself on several occasions, that I have experienced positively and that I wish to continue. Open discussion may not bring an immediate and ready-made solution at this level, but it does at least promote greater awareness of a multifaceted reality.

6. An appreciation of the everyday

Anyone who is familiar with my columns in *Tertio*, *Basis*, *Ezra* or *Golfslag* knows my view of the world and of humanity. It concerns a vision and experience of reality in which attention to the everyday, to the fragile and even unsightly, always comes strongly to the fore. When speaking of quality human life and cooperation, one speaks of a tangible reality. It is not just about thoughts and ideas, but about a grounded and concretely experienced reality. From this point of view, I think it is very important to pay more attention to the aesthetics, style and conviviality of our physical environment, to the 'decoration' of the staffroom and the student room, to providing a cosy place to have a drink together and share life, but also a place to discuss work or consult together, and finally to providing a place to quietly withdraw for a moment in reflection and meditation for those who need to do so.

IV. WHY BÉNÉDICTE LEMMELIJN?

Against the background of the genuine 'vision' evoked above, the realistic 'vision' described and the suggested policy concretisation, this final section would like to dwell on a number of qualities, competences and aspects from my curriculum that demonstrate that, from this perspective, I am a suitable candidate for dean.

1. From cradle to foundations...

First of all, I would like to mention that I have 'known' the faculty since I was a child; it was already present in my cradle, so to speak. My father was the first administrative secretary of the Higher Institute for Religious Studies in the 1960s, after he himself studied theology in Bonn (because, as a layman, it was not yet possible at our faculty). He was one of the first in the diocese of Hasselt to be ordained a deacon in 1972, and after leaving the faculty in 1968, he has been a teacher of religion all his life. It was in this context that I became acquainted, from childhood on, with parish pastoral life, with commitment in the diocese, with diaconal and pastoral councils, with theology as a scientific discipline... On the inside cover of his copy of Otto Eissfeldt's *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, I wrote in large angular letters 'papa'.... even before I could really write. He died last year. I still have the book.

On that track, and strengthened by my personal and religious conviction that studying theology and serving in that context would be a meaningful path in life, I started as a 17-year-old in 1987 in the then first year of candidacy in Religious Studies at our faculty. I have been here ever since, even though learning, studying, reflecting and teaching have been supplemented over the years by a great deal of

international experience, especially in the context of South Africa. I never suspected at the time where this path would lead me and what horizons would open up.

2. An intrinsic interconnectedness of theology and faith: broad commitment and public engagement

In this life context, theology has always been an intrinsic intertwining of rational, intellectual and scientific reflection on the one hand, with a purified, critical but loyal faith on the other, in the context of the local church in my parish (with strong commitment as a young person in my bilingual native village in the Voerstreek and later in my current residence), in Flanders (with a great deal of service in the field of scientific communication and, where appropriate, very often religious witnessing) and, more recently, also in effective service to the World Church since my appointment to the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PCB). It goes without saying that this last reality creates for me a privileged link with the Church and, as a result, also makes it easy for me to connect with it.

That these two aspects are intrinsically intertwined for me may also be demonstrated by the book I wrote in this context, *Mijn geloof als Bijbelwetenschapper. Een broos maar eerlijk antwoord* (*My Faith as a Biblical Scholar. A Vulnerably Honest Answer*), Halewijn, November 2016, which received the Audience Award for Religious and Spiritual Book in 2017, has now gone through five printings, appeared in Russian in 2020, and is awaiting publication in French and English translations. In the same vein, with a view to synergy between the multiple and multifaceted search of people today on the one hand and the rich Christian and Biblical tradition on the other, another book for a broad audience was published, *Mindful geluk. Vanuit eeuwenoude Bijbelse Wijsheid* (*Mindful Happiness. From Ancient Biblical Wisdom*), which has been a repeated bestseller for Averbode Publishers since 2017 and now also has three printings.

This broad involvement with church and society is further expressed, and already from the start, in a very extensive commitment in the field of science communication in lectures and in the regular provision of columns in *Tertio*, *Basis*, *Ezra* and *Golfslag*. A collection of the latter, more existentially reflective texts will be published in the autumn. Finally, the same sometimes meditative view of reality is also expressed in the two collections of poems that I published as the former city poet of my hometown Zoutleeuw, in the context of which a selection of poems also invites people to contemplate briefly in public places.

This openness to and connection with church and society also results regularly and for several years in public positions and interviews in the wider media, both internal to the KU Leuven (*Veto*, *Campuskrant*, *Areopaag*) and wider ecclesiastical (*K&L*, *Tertio*, *Pastoralia* ...) and even wider social (newspapers *HLN*, *BVL*, *De Standaard*, *De Morgen*) as well as audiovisual on radio and TV, and finally also via the internet, for example in *Universiteit van Vlaanderen* or *Dominicanen.tv*.

Finally, it is also expressed in my active and repeated participation in study days and permanent education within the faculty and the university, for a wider audience: *Logos*, *Peace Day*, *University Third Age*, *Lessons for the XXIst Century*, *Didachè Bible*, both in delivering lectures and in organising them.

3. Globally recognised academic research in Text Criticism of the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint Studies

In the field of research, against the background of my expertise in textual and redaction criticism of the Old Testament, I direct the *Centre for Septuagint Studies and Textual Criticism* (https://theo.kuleuven.be/en/research/centres/centr_sept/), in the context of which I have developed, together with my husband and colleague at UCLouvain, Hans Ausloos, a new criteriology

for characterising the translation technique of individual Septuagint books. This criteriology has been elaborated in a large number of peer reviewed scientific articles and contributions. It has been internationally recognised and applied, and is continuously refined and further innovatively developed in the doctorates based on it, and by collaborators who have become professors and recognised scholars in many places in the world and at KU Leuven itself.

The *Louvain Centre for Septuagint Studies and Textual Criticism*, together with its partner group at UCLouvain, is considered worldwide to be one of the leading centres in Septuagint research (cf. K.H. JOBES & M. SILVA, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, p. 356, sub 'Major organisations and Research Projects').

My successive and changing service and management tasks over the past 20 years have not prevented me from also being fully committed to research. Besides my membership in various international scientific organisations and editorial boards, just two examples: a monograph that, in the meantime, became a standard in terms of the text-critical study of Exodus: B. LEMMELIJN, *A Plague of Texts? A Text-Critical Study of the So-Called 'Plagues Narrative' in Exodus 7,14–11,10* (Oudtestamentische Studiën/Old Testament Studies, 56), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2009, XII-384p. and the recent publication of the first exhaustive 'Theology of the Septuagint' in the prestigious series of the *Handbuch zur Septuaginta* in the context of the projects of Septuaginta Deutsch [H. AUSLOOS & B. LEMMELIJN (eds.), *Die Theologie der Septuaginta* (Handbuch zur Septuaginta, 5), Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 2020, ISBN 978-3-579-08103-8, 605 p]. A new upcoming monograph on the redactional history of Ex 7–11 is almost finalised and will be submitted for publication still this year. A full bibliography can be consulted via Lirias.

4. Education: multifaceted and multiform

In the field of education, I have taught many different courses on various parts and aspects of the study of the Old Testament since 1993 (first as an assistant, then as a substitute, then as professor and coordinator), and this both in the Dutch and International programmes. Moreover, I have taught courses at all levels of our programmes, from candidature to licenciate, from bachelor to master and research master, and in various educational forms, from lecture to seminar. Finally, since 2002, I have taught annually several RZL courses to large groups of students: first only in the Faculty of Arts, since 2010 also in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. For each of these courses, I have always received a great and special appreciation over the years. Moreover, I provided a published handbook.

In 2010-2011, I also took the lead in the reorganisation of the Old Testament course units, in a shift from a corpus-based to a more diverse method-based approach.

Moreover, during numerous and quite lengthy stays abroad as a visiting professor, mainly in South Africa, I gave many lectures in very diverse contexts, a practice that I also continued in participation in Erasmus.

Finally, I also acted as co-promoter in a successful educational project, *ICT in Faculty Education Programmes*, IMBEZE (01.10.2003-30.09.2005) and participated not only as a participant but also twice as a 'contributor' within the training for beginning teachers 'Teaching at the KU Leuven' (DUO/ICTO), in 2007 and 2008, where I offered a module/lecture on 'Interactive teaching for large groups', against the background of my broad RZL experience.

5. Faculty and university services: experience and responsibility

As the eldest of five children, I have always been used to caring and taking responsibility. In my years of studying at high school (Greek-Latin), I was more than once class representative. In Leuven, I became

an ABAP representative for a while. And after that, from the moment I was appointed – or even before – the administrative and service tasks followed one another in varying assignments and constellations. I was, among other things, ombudsperson, secretary of the Teaching Committee (POC), member of the ZAP-evaluation commission, member of the Evaluation Committee (Beoordelingscommissie, BeCo), vice-dean for Internationalisation, member of the Council for Internationalisation (RIB), deputy member of the Interfaculty Council for Development Cooperation (IRO), member of the Faculty Board, member of the Doctoral Committee (ODC), representative member for the faculty in the Assemblée Générale of Lumen Vitae in Namur, Chair of the faculty Committee for Study Allowances, Chair of the Advisory Committee for International Students (ACIS), member of the Admissions Committee, academic manager of the International Sisters Community, Chair of the Evaluation Committee (BeCo), coordinator of the Research Unit Biblical Sciences, member of the expert panel Cult 4 in the FWO for six years and currently member of its Committee for International Scientific Contacts (CIWC).

These varied and multifaceted tasks have profoundly shaped me into the person I am today. I have become familiar with almost every aspect of the functioning of our faculty, both at the level of education (POC), research (FWO, ODC) and internationalisation (vice dean, RIB, IRO, ACIS). I have learned how to make contacts and prepare contracts; write projects and prepare vision texts, organise and coordinate meetings, assess and describe personnel files with respect and appreciation, edit self-evaluation reports and endure visitations ... ‘Tried and tested’, as they say.

6. A woman in the world

Finally, it goes without saying that I am someone who has both feet firmly planted in reality. I am married to Hans Ausloos, fellow Biblical scholar. We have three children, now adolescents, who in recent years have brought university life into our home from their perspective and are now gradually standing on their own two feet and spreading their wings. In intense consultation with my family, who have been my priority all these years – also in and through all the efforts described above – and with their full support, I am today standing as a candidate for dean.

A human life is not always one linear progression; there are phases in which one aspect deserves more or less attention than another. I have always tried to make conscious choices, in the greatest possible inner freedom, during these different phases of my life. Today, I am making a new, conscious and well-considered choice. In this phase of my life, I believe I am able to concentrate on the demanding and multifaceted task of dean with great mental freedom and maximum time availability.

It is a task that I do not see as gaining power, but rather as taking intrinsic responsibility, with a view to promoting and encouraging, but also caring for all those and everything entrusted to me in this context. As a biblical scholar, you will forgive me for referring once again to those ancient texts. Leadership in the Old Testament, and especially in the Wisdom literature which I personally treasure, is understood in a particular way. True leadership is always earned by true authority, not claimed by power. And true authority has nothing to do with ‘playing the boss’; it is entirely about mutual respect, about caring for the realisation of optimal possibilities for the harmonious development and fulfilment of fellow human beings and about the creation of a nurturing environment for that. That is the environment I want to try to build, not alone, but together with each of you, each with your own background and horizon, with your own ideas, desires and dreams.

Let me therefore consider myself a ‘bridge figure’ between the past and the future of our faculty. In the light of the vision described above, I want to dedicate myself to setting out beacons of hope for a radically new era that may dawn. A tide for turning, a time of hope.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS THE FUTURE IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

“This is what remains: faith, hope and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love”, says Paul in 1 Cor 13:13. Much has been written about it. It is said to be the best known and most fundamental short form of what it means to be a Christian. Many have philosophised about what hope means, and what faith means, and what love means, and why love is the greatest. It became the hallmark of the (perhaps idealised) early Christian community life and the oldest Christian theology. But this much seems clear to Paul: what it means to be a Christian becomes clearest where faith, hope and love become one. Faith, hope and love form the basis of both the unity and the multiformity of Christian spirituality. Because they raise the whole of ‘ordinary’ life to ‘spiritual’ life. Because all that we are and have, do, hope and believe is placed under one horizon of divine Love made human.

Indeed, much can be theologised about it. It may have meant all sorts of things in that distant past. But it is just as true today, also in the context of a faculty reality and concrete leadership in that framework. And perhaps, very fundamentally, it is also simply a deeply human reality. Love is the greatest, absolutely. But love without hope is powerless. And hope without faith is groundless. And yet, without love they are both nothing. Faith without love becomes rock-hard ideology or self-centred worldliness. After all, turning to God has an intrinsic flipside in turning to God’s people. And hope without love, which makes it work, becomes an illusion alien to life. Paul was right. Faith, hope and love appear to be inseparable.

And yet Love is the greatest. At least, that is what I believe and hope ... And that is what I want to try to achieve. In the prayer of Marinus van den Berg it sounds like this:

For leadership that can listen.

For leadership that thinks.

For leadership that consults.

For leadership that allows criticism.

For leadership with self-knowledge.

For leadership that can grow.

For leadership that can bend.

For leadership close to people.

For leadership that knows how to connect.

For leadership that inspires confidence.

For leadership that does justice.

For leadership that does not rule, but serves.

For leadership that protects the vulnerable.

For leadership that embraces the stranger.

For leadership that strengthens hope and love.