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INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2019, Prof. Pieter Verster officially retires as Professor in the Department of Practical and Missional Theology of the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State. Since 1981, he has been a minister of the Word of God in the Dutch Reformed Church; since 1992, he has been lecturer and, from 1997, Professor in Missiology. He has had an outstanding academic career. In recognising his academic contribution, acclaiming his dedication to the formation of students and in appreciating him as colleague and loyal friend, it has been decided to dedicate this *Acta Theologica Supplementum* edition as *Festschrift* in honour of him. This is not merely because it is customary in academic circles, but it is also a well-deserved acknowledgment of Pieter's illustrious career. A token of appreciation!

Several authors in this edition express their appreciation of Pieter's persistent theological approach, focusing on what is to him the core issue of the gospel and of mission. In his article, Abraham van de Beek summarises it well: "Pieter Verster pleads for understanding mission as reconciliation, and this not so much as a variation on social justice, but as a fundamental new relation of God to man. Christology is the centre of his missiological paradigm." This would not be a popular approach. Van de Beek thus concludes: "Verster's paradigm challenges theology. It challenges the church. It challenges all Christians." In a message, Dr Andries Hoffman, a close colleague, wrote in appreciation of, and pointed to Pieter's compassion for the poor, his lifelong dedication to make their words (voices) be heard, his love for expressive, communicative words (poetry, the performative character of words) and for the Word of God, in particular. Van Engen also alludes to "... his joy in teaching, his love for the Bible, his deep faith in Jesus

Christ, and his commitment to listen ...". *Acta Theologica* is glad to be able to dedicate this *Acta Theologica Supplementum 28* as *Festschrift* to Prof. Pieter Verster.

The first two articles focus on reconciliation, a core concept in Verster's mission paradigm. Van de Beek enters into deliberate discussion with Verster and reflects on a Biblical understanding of the concept. He agrees with Verster: "It is important to state at the onset that God's great turning towards the world in the form of His Son Jesus Christ is mission's point of departure." Niemandt and Pillay propose a practical model for meaningful reconciliation in the current South African context. The missional challenge for a reconciled people (the church in South Africa nowadays) is to engage others in the same manner in which God engages them.

In his article, Van Engen emphasises the importance of genuine partnerships in a new missionary era – the so-called shift of gravity in global Christianity from the North and the West to the East and the South, where missionary activities are moving from everywhere to everywhere and from everyone to everyone. He warns of pitfalls in partnerships and stresses the importance of approaching partnerships with integrity.

The next three articles deal with mission and social issues. Potgieter explores John Calvin's approach to socio-economic, sociopolitical and human relationship issues and shows how it was dominated by his interpretation of Holy Scripture as the infallible Word of God and his faith in the Providence of God. Makofane & Botha did some research on the theme: Christianity and social transformation in post-apartheid South Africa: From prophetic quietism to signs of prophetic recovery. Can the post-apartheid church regain its prophetic voice? Van der Merwe & Thebe investigate the conundrum faced by Christian traditional leaders in the Batswana culture. Many Christians, especially members of the African Independent Churches, live a strange life, with one foot rooted in the African traditional beliefs and the other in Christian beliefs and practices.

Van der Watt gives an overview of the renowned Afrikaans author Karel Schoeman's formidable oeuvre on 17th- and 18th-century South African mission history and explores the relevance of his historiographic approach for a responsible methodology to the writing of mission history.

Odendaal, a close friend of Verster, gives an exposition of Isaiah 40:1-11, underlining the wonderful message that Yahweh will comfort the exiles and Jerusalem. Jahweh knows of, and cares for the suffering of his traumatised people. Because of the nature of a *Festschrift*, the editorial committee gladly accepted Van Coller's contribution. His article is not of a theological nature; it is rather about the phenomenon of satire in Afrikaans literature, especially in the work of the prominent poet N.P. van Wyk Louw. Verster has a great interest in Van Wyk Louw's work and published an academic article on his work.

Strauss' article, in the field of church history and church order, focuses on the involvement of the church and the state in solemnising marriages, with a reference to three important Reformed church orders. Clarity is needed on the roles of both the church and the state in the current diversification of approaches to the institution of marriage in the South African context.

The editorial committee requested Pieter to provide a list of his publications and one of his Afrikaans poems for publication in this edition. The poem is on the meaning of Christ's suffering and death on the cross as gift of life. This is beautifully linked to Rembrandt's painting *Descent from the Cross* on the front page.

Gideon van der Watt

Guest Editor