OUR FAITH IN THE FUTURE

CONNECTING PEOPLE FROM ALL RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND CONVICTIONS
Amsterdam welcomes thirty newborn children today. Their future is unwritten. Nevertheless, many things are already defined. It does matter whether you are a boy or a girl, whether your skin is dark or light, being born in a poor 1950's neighbourhood or in the affluent city centre matters, being the youngest of eight siblings or an only child matters. It does matter whether your parents will raise you in their belief in God or whether your upbringing will be secular.

One day these new citizens of Amsterdam will meet. They will experience how different from one another they are. But also that they have a lot in common, other than sharing the same date of birth. How will they approach each other? Will their differences or their similarities prevail? Today Amsterdam is a city accommodating 178 nationalities and dozens of religious beliefs and convictions. This is a challenge to which every single citizen of Amsterdam must relate.

This reality has prompted us to create a theological faculty that is unique in the Netherlands and even the world. We accommodate all major world religions and spiritual convictions. We offer research opportunities and teaching programmes that will benefit today's newborns in their future lives, in this city and elsewhere. We are creating the theology of the future for today's thirty new children of Amsterdam. And for the next thirty, for whom the great adventure of life starts tomorrow.

Wim Janse, Dean of the Faculty of Theology, VU University Amsterdam

For more information about our research and teaching programmes, please visit the English language section of www.godgeleerdheid.vu.nl.
When Abraham Kuyper founded the Vrije Universiteit (literally: Free University) in 1880, this was a step towards innovation in a world that was far simpler than ours. He considered it his mission to build a university based on the idea that scientists should be able to research and teach free from church and state, yet not free from values. Science should always take religious values and existential convictions into account.

FIGHT FOR FREEDOM
Science has a responsibility to claim its own freedom through constant innovation. Kuyper began something new, and so did we, when we decided to create a faculty that practices theology in the context of all major world religions. This step brought us a new mission: creating the theology of the future.

MISSION
The Faculty of Theology contributes to an open society with excellent research and teaching, that accommodates individuals and communities affiliated with all kinds of religious traditions and existential convictions.

Theology according to Prof. Willie van der Merwe, professor Philosophy of Religion, Intercultural and Contextual Hermeneutics

'We are formulating the new theologies for future generations. We are forging the key to analyse and interpret the post-secular society with its emerging religiosity.'
OUR ROLE TODAY

RELIGION MATTERS

Why work on creating the theology of the future today?
At the beginning of the 21st century, Amsterdam is the stage for an amazing experiment, that of an interreligious culture. Our society is post-Christian, post-secular, post-modern. On one hand there is a strong movement towards the global village. On the other, there is a trend towards all things local and individual. To succeed in today’s society, we need keys to unlock the doors of diversity. Religion and personal convictions matter more than ever.

WE ARE AT THE CENTRE
Today’s reality inspires our mission. This is why we want to be leading within the Benelux as the place to be for the study of religion and spirituality in relation to society. Together with other faculties at VU University, we are training professionals who serve as experts in matters of religious faith and existential conviction, in public administration, the care sector and business.

THE TIME IS RIGHT
At VU University we are given ample opportunity to build a strong faculty broadly oriented towards religions and convictions. The national government supports our mission through both funding and policy. Many international partners are looking to connect with us. We are getting good press, at home and abroad. The teaching programmes for religious leaders strengthen our mission and increase our social relevance.

THEOLOGY ACCORDING TO PROF. Kees van der Kooi, professor Systematic Theology

“We are a Christian faculty working in a multireligious context, providing hospitality to other schools of thought and faiths. We applaud and harness diversity in order to contribute to society.”

‘VU UNIVERSITY MADE THE TRANSITION FROM A CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY TO A STRONGHOLD OF MULTICULTURALISM WHERE ALL FAITHS ARE THE SUBJECT OF STUDY AND RESEARCH.’
HP De Tijd, April 2012

WE ARE DRIVEN TO TRAIN THE RESEARCHERS AND ACADEMICS WHO CAN CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY BY PROVIDING SCIENTIFICALLY-BASED ANSWERS TO TODAY’S AND TOMORROW’S RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS.

WE ARE CONNECTING PEOPLE FROM ALL RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND CONVICTIONS.
OUR FAITH IN THE FUTURE
CONNECTING PEOPLE FROM ALL RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND CONVICTIONS

‘AN OFTEN-QUOTED SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR A PROSPECTIVE FLEMISH IMAM PROGRAMME IS THE THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES, ISLAM PROGRAMME AT VU UNIVERSITY.’
Magazine Knack, April 2012

OUR DIVERSITY TODAY
GROUNDS FOR DIALOGUE

One can only be ‘open, responsible and personal’ if one knows why these values matter in our day and age. The Faculty of Theology promotes an open-minded discourse between all religious faiths and existential convictions. We provide the grounds for a dialogue between Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Jews and humanists. Thus we are creating a platform to develop a theology of the future. By accommodating all major world religions, offering a joint Bachelor’s of Theology as well as a Bachelor’s of Theology and Religious Studies, and a new Master’s programme, we can fulfil our public mission.

Theology according to Dr Maarten Wisse, lecturer
Dogmatics and Ecumenics

‘A vital part of real diversity is being prepared to be annoyed by each other. Experiencing the toughness of diversity makes us realise that we can fundamentally disagree, while acknowledging how much the other cares.’

WHICH RELIGIONS AND CONVICTIONS ARE REPRESENTED AT THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY?

Mainstream Protestant
Humanist
Remonstrant
Pentecostal
Eastern Orthodox
Spiritually Independent

Restored Reformed
Baptist
Buddhist
Hindu
Islamic
Religiously Involved

THE VALUES AT THE CORE OF VU UNIVERSITY ARE ‘OPEN, RESPONSIBLE AND PERSONAL’.

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SCIENCE FIRST

Our faculty is as diverse and multicoloured as society itself. If you pay attention you will notice the similarities; if you listen even more closely the differences will be apparent. We are just like the thirty children from the introductory chapter. There is one thing that unites us more than anything else: a strong passion for science. Whoever presents an interesting research proposition has our ear. That is when we connect. No matter how differently we think about religion, we are all driven to practise science.

SERIOUS SCIENCE
We take faith seriously, but also accept that the religious experience is a highly individual matter. Our faculty promotes the idea that it is important and necessary for every human being to form his or her religious faith or conviction. We supply scientific arguments to support this plea. Our researchers are scientists working from an insider perspective. Normative aspects of faith are an object of study. With relevant research and teaching programmes, the Faculty of Theology contributes to bringing communities together in a mutual discourse without surrendering their own identities.

ONE REFEREE
What is it that makes our faculty unique as a centre of expertise and a research laboratory? By adopting an insider’s perspective in study and research, researchers can assess a text or historical event and practise science objectively without putting aside their convictions. At the same time we shelve our presuppositions and play by strict scientific rules. Science is our referee.

Theology according to Prof. Martien Brinkman, professor of Ecumenical and Intercultural Theology

‘The essence of diversity is not choosing to simply coexist, but committing to discourse. An inter-religious dialogue requires constant maintenance, so as to keep an open mind towards the other.’
Our faculty collaborates with other faculties, is interreligious and is internationally oriented. Reformed Christians are invited to a dialogue with Muslims or Jews about the meaning and interpretation of holy books. This dialogue and interpretation are in themselves objects of study. For instance, when we analyse reader responses, students with a Western background often appear to be focused on the narrative aspects of the text, whereas African students tend to interpret texts from a sociological perspective. By bringing world religions and international perspectives together we are building a bridge for innovation, leading to the theology of the future.

Common thread in research
In our research we focus on specific themes. A common thread runs through our work: new research expands on existing expertise. Research is performed increasingly by project teams consisting of postdoctoral students, assistant professors and professors. Together with other faculties we organise conferences on themes such as ‘Reconciliation and Jurisdiction’ or ‘Ethics in Care’. We are developing a school of theology centred around hospitality, memory and reconciliation.

Doors open
‘What’s in it for me?’ This is often the first question scientists are asked when they talk about their research. Society appreciates the usefulness of training academics for jobs in the armed forces, hospitals, prisons and other places where people from different religious backgrounds interact. But what is the use of fundamental research? We will gladly take the time to explain. For instance that fundamental research into the different origins of religious texts is essential for a proper understanding of Christian conventions and Islamic traditions. Our doors are always open to anyone with a curious mind.

Productive seclusion
In our corner of the VU University Campus we keep the doors open as we build a sense of community. Does this leave any room for the splendour of academic isolation? As scientists we know the value of seclusion. The best ideas and smartest inventions often originate in complete isolation. That is exactly why sabbaticals are a welcome diversion from the everyday research practice.

Theology according to Dr Arie Zwiep, lecturer New Testament and Hermeneutics

‘The faculty resembles a symphony orchestra. The composition in its entirety is what matters. The result is a colourful spectacle.’

Our theological roots remain relevant. We will continue to produce knowledge in our traditional fields.
THE FUTURE OF OUR SOCIETY

RECIPE AGAINST VIOLENCE

From 2020 onwards the number of 18-year-olds in the Netherlands will decline, with the exception of Amsterdam and the province of Noord-Holland. There the increase can be accounted for largely by the third generation of non-western immigrants. VU University is the emancipatory university where tomorrow’s generations work together to shape their world. At VU University, each faith or conviction, working from their own perspective, develops instruments for interpersonal dialogue. This is our contribution to conflict management between religions. It makes perfect sense that there is a public debate on religious violence and violence in religious texts. We will have succeeded in our mission when it makes equal sense for journalists, politicians and citizens to approach us for analysis and expertise.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND SPIRITUAL COUNSELLORS

Our faculty produces academics who become religious leaders in communities. During their academic careers they have been able to perform fundamental research as well as studying religion from various perspectives. They are thus ideally equipped to establish connections with other religious or spiritual communities. An understanding of community informs them on how to collaborate with people and how to strengthen social ties. We also train professionals for interreligious spiritual counselling. Our pastoral workers are aware that the Netherlands has as many Muslims as Asian Christians or Dutch Protestants. Every clergyman is bound to come into contact with interreligious couples. Amsterdam yields many different challenges. In some parts of the city it is essential to be well versed in the social conventions of the Muslim community. In other areas knowledge of ancestor veneration is required.

TOGETHER WITH THE COMMUNITY

In consultation with medical professionals, business administrators and philosophers, we pursue ethical themes relevant to society. Around these themes, we develop courses and seminars for students as well as seminars for fellow staff, for instance concerning palliative care and organ donation from a Christian or Islamic perspective.

Theology according to Prof. Faustina Doufikar-Aerts, professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

“We are the only academic programme in the Netherlands teaching Islam from an insider perspective. Our faculty aims to train a new generation of spiritual leaders for the Islamic religious community.”
The new world order with countries like China, Brazil, Indonesia and Russia on the rise both economically and culturally, presents us with major challenges. The variety of world religions anchors it firmly within the international academic community. We are able to attract international staff members and students from all over the world. At the same time, VU University remains at the forefront of Calvinistic theology. We safeguard the existing expertise that is unique in the world. We cherish our roots, Reformed Protestantism and our strong ties with the United States, South Africa, South Korea and Germany. Traditionally the faculty has also enjoyed valuable contacts in Scotland and Hungary. We have made arrangements on joint research and degrees with emerging countries. Our aim is to found a League of European Faculties of Theology and Religious Studies. It is in the interest of the European Union to invest in an international theology of the future.

PARTNERSHIPS IN SOCIETY
All scientific endeavours have an ethical and an existential aspect, whether it be religious or secular. Every business, every public administration needs to employ professionals who are experts in these fields. Increasingly, organisations and businesses benefit from our expertise. Private donations are earmarked within our philosophy of research and teaching.

Theology according to Prof. André van der Braak, professor Buddhist Philosophy in Dialogue with Other Traditions.

"Society had a growing need for religious experts able to mediate between religious and secular citizens. We are training academics who are flexible enough to switch between insider and outsider perspectives on religion."
Our students are our future, our teaching programme matters. We choose to be strongly geared towards the job market. This works both ways. On the one hand, we promote the relevance of our product in the market place, while on the other, we equip students to choose appropriate careers. We are constantly adapting our curriculum to changes in the labour market. The strength of science is its constant drive to innovate. By constantly innovative research and by training new generations of scientists and academic professionals, our faculty contributes to a vital society.

**TOMORROW’S JOBS**

In a world where increasing numbers of people are living in cities, we are bound to encounter others from very different backgrounds. How can we ensure that a young Muslim woman can function properly in the care sector while adhering to the values of her religion? How can a Reformed Protestant warden in a prison interact with a Buddhist inmate? How do atheist parents deal with a schoolteacher who wears a headscarf? The post-secular, multi-religious society needs academics who offer insights into the differences between people and their motivations, and who can forge connections in challenging environments.

Theology according to Annewieke Vroom, MA, lecturer/researcher

"VU University contributes to the common good of the city, the nation and the international community by training academics who make constructive contributions to society at large."
OUR FACULTY HAS ALL THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CITY OF AMSTERDAM, WITH ITS 178 NATIONALITIES. THE STUDENT POPULATION AT THE DE BOELELAAN IS AS DIVERSE AS THE PASSENGERS TRAVELLING ON THE CITY’S UNDERGROUND SYSTEM.

STRONG BACHELOR’S, SPECIALISED MASTER’S
The Bachelor’s degree at VU University derives considerable strength from the large number of religions and convictions our faculty accommodates. At the same time, our Graduate School features an excellent Master’s programme geared towards scientific research and degrees. Our research generates both scientists and community leaders. Students tend to choose not only on the basis of a teaching programme, but also consider whether professors and lecturers are leading in their area of expertise or school of thought. Our staff is strongly committed to this faculty, with its multifaceted identity. This delivers added value for ambitious students in the Master’s programme.

DIVERSITY IN TEACHING
Of course our alumni are experts on the religions they have studied so extensively. They will also have attended lectures focusing on other schools of thought and faiths. They will have contemplated questions on the interpretation of holy texts of other religions. We offer additional courses for students who have successfully completed their degrees at other faculties and wish to broaden their contribution to society. We offer a Master’s degree for any student of Business Administration or journalist wanting to specialise in religion and community.

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
The Faculty of Theology offers five teaching programmes:
• Bachelor of Theology joint degree (with PThU)
• Bachelor of Religion and Creeds
• One-year Master of Theology and Religious studies, with specialisations in Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism
• Two-year Master of Theology and Religious Studies, Research
• Three-year Master of Theology and Religious Studies

We offer three University Minors: Islam, Soul of Europe and History of the Reformation.

The one-year Master of Arts programme aims to train academic professionals specialising in the role of religion in several areas of society.

The two-year Master of Arts programme is the research Master’s, training students for a career in scientific research.

The three-year Master of Arts programme qualifies students to become clergymen for the Restored Reformed, Mennonite, Baptist or Remonstrant Church.

Theology according to Dr Marianne Moyaert, professor Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics of Interreligious Dialogue

‘Here, diversity is not a mere object of study examined from a safe distance. It is the starting point from which questions arise. We encourage students to take positions, to go beyond gut feeling and public opinion.’
HOW DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE FUTURE?

We are keen to discuss your ideas and thoughts about faith in today’s and tomorrow’s society. You are welcome to contact Dean Wim Janse directly at w.janse@vu.nl, or to make an appointment by calling +31 20 598 66 09. We look forward to meeting you.

Theology according to Prof. Wim Janse, Dean of the Faculty

‘A university is a factory of inventors. We turn out good ideas by the dozens. In the end our focus lies outside our own circle. The university’s mission is to equip tomorrow’s generations for a multi-religious society.’