

Curriculum Vitae

- I was born in 1929 on a farm in the Orange Free State called Hoopwel (Hopewell) in Heilbron, South Africa, in a family with seven children. My father hoped and planned that I – being his only son and heir – would succeed him. However, among other considerations, the wish of my mother – based on a pledge like the Biblical Hannah's – that I should be trained for the ministry, ultimately resolved my career.
- I attended the regional Primary School on a neighbouring farm, and the double medium Secondary School in Heilbron, where I passed the matriculation examination with distinctions in Latin, Mathematics, and Chemistry-Physics. In 1947 I enrolled at the University of Pretoria to study theology. In the Faculty of Arts, after three years, I was awarded the BA degree *cum laude*, having majored in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. After three more years in the Faculty of Theology, I received the BD degree and qualified for the ministry in the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (Dutch Reformed Church of Africa: DRCA, to be distinguished from the other, better known, Afrikaner church, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk: DRC).
In December 1952 I married Lenie Spruyt, a fellow-student of Dutch origin, whose family had emigrated to South Africa after the Second World War. We were offered the DRCA vicarage in Brits, near Pretoria, where I worked as a temporary pastor while preparing for my MA-examination in Semitic Languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Akkadian, and Ugaritic) with Professor A. van Selms as my tutor. In September 1953 we left for the Netherlands for advanced study.
- At the beginning of the academic year 1953-1954, I started my doctoral study at the State University of Groningen in the Theological Faculty and the Faculty of Arts. My main subject was Old Testament under the supervision of Professor Th.C. Vriezen, who guided me reading selected chapters from Tanakh and Akkadian cuneiform texts, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Babylonian Epic of Creation. Together with Adam van der Woude, Vriezen's assistant at the time, I also read several texts from Qumran in unforgettable *privatissima* in Vriezen's study. Since Van der Woude also wanted to learn Ugaritic, the two of us read a number of Ugaritic texts.
My first subsidiary was Religious Studies under the guidance of Professor Th. P. van Baaren, who also taught me a course of Egyptian. My second subsidiary was Assyrian-Babylonian in the Faculty of Arts under the supervision of Professor J.H. Hospers, who also taught me a course of Arabic. In November 1955, having passed the examinations and having written the required thesis (in Dutch), *The Use of the Divine Name in the Writings of the Prophets* (within the customary ten days), I was awarded my certificate *cum laude*. In the meantime my wife and I had followed courses in Italian, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, and travelled all over Europe, soaking up the rich European culture.
- At the end of 1956 my studies stagnated due to Vriezen's move to Utrecht, the Suez crisis and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, not to mention my sky-high student loans. We returned to South Africa, where I was ordained a minister of the DRCA in the town of Wolmaransstad, Western Transvaal. During our two years in the vicarage I wrote my MA thesis, *The Authority of the King over*

Property in Ugarit, under the supervision of Professor Van Selms, and was awarded the MA degree in Semitic Languages *cum laude* in 1959.

In the meantime we had moved to Pretoria where I started my academic career on 1 February 1959 at the University of Pretoria as junior lecturer in the Department of Semitic Languages in the Faculty of Arts. I was also appointed (by the DRCA) to teach Biblical Studies (Old Testament) at the nearby Normaalkollege, an institution for teacher training. This appointment was abruptly terminated when the church authorities began to realize that I was against apartheid, especially when I openly sided with Professor Albert Geyser and Professor Adrianus van Selms, the front-runners within the DRCA in the struggle against apartheid.

At the time, 1962, the church had already defrocked and sacked Geyser on the pretext of 'heresy', and Van Selms was publicly defamed for his stance on apartheid and particularly because he had written a pamphlet on the church and secret societies in which he exposed the mighty Afrikaner Broederbond, a secret organisation of which almost all prominent Afrikaners in leading positions were members. Since I took it on me to distribute the pamphlets from my home address, I incurred their hatred.

- Three positive high points that year were: 1) the promotion ceremony in March, when I received my DD-degree, 2) the birth of our first child, our son Bart, in April, and 3) the upgrading of my post to that of senior lecturer. I was awarded the DD-degree *cum laude* on the basis of my dissertation under the supervision of Professor E.S. Mulder, *Die onvergelyklikheid van Jahwe in die Ou Testament* (revised and translated: *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, E.J. Brill: Leiden 1966).

The last eight years of my career in South Africa, 1960-1967, were marked by the struggle against apartheid, which was particularly bitter in the DRCA, especially after I became a member of the Christian Institute - an association dedicated to putting the evil of apartheid on the agenda of the churches - of which I was a co-founder in August 1963, a month before the birth of our daughter Trudy in September.

In May 1967, a few days after my father died, I was summoned to appear before a special committee of the church to account for my membership of the Christian Institute. The DRCA had forced me and other dissidents to choose between membership of the church and the Institute. My refusal to comply led to my dismissal as a minister of the DRCA. This happened after the judicial verdict in the sensational court case in which Albert Geyser and the Reverend Beyers Naudé, at the time director of the Christian Institute, had sued Professor A.D. Pont for libel. I acted as their main witness, much to the chagrin of the leaders of the church. Pont was found guilty and had to pay all the costs and the highest fine ever exacted in South Africa. Soon after the verdict, the Moderator made a public appeal to raise money for a fund in support of Pont. That was the last straw that made our position untenable. Together with a number of other dissidents, I left that Church and found asylum in the Presbyterian Church, which awarded me and the other theologians the status we had been deprived of by the DRCA. We organized the dissident group to constitute an Afrikaans speaking community within the Presbyterian church of St Andrews, where I had the honour of leading the first service.

- Because of these events, my position at the University of Pretoria became precarious, without any prospects for promotion. Instead of accepting an offer to join the Presbyterian schooling for ministers in Grahams Town, I applied for the post of professor of Semitic Languages at the University of South Africa (Unisa) in Pretoria, which happened to be vacant at the time. However, despite the unanimous recommendation by the committee, the Rector summarily blocked my appointment, obviously for political reasons. When later that day I received an invitation from the Theological Faculty in Groningen to come and teach there, I immediately accepted and we left the country. I was appointed as lector (associate professor) in December 1967 and later became professor, where I taught until my retirement in 1991.
- Working and living in the Netherlands enabled me to devote my time and energy unhampered to scientific study of the Bible and to communicate the results to a broader public. In addition to my academic activities of teaching and research, I considered it my duty to translate and convey such deeper insights to people on the ground level. Through the years, in sermons, public lectures, articles, and books - some of which are to be found on the [internet](#) -, I have always tried to offer fellow believers an alternative to the traditional, naïve, fundamentalistic understanding of the Bible, urging them to benefit from the fruits of Biblical science and to integrate the new insights into their religious life.
- My *magnum opus* is my commentary (in Dutch) on Deuteronomy (1987-1997). What I consider my most important contribution to Biblical Study is that I promoted and advanced the understanding of the Biblical writings as numerical compositions – in spite of considerable scholarly scepticism and [ridicule](#). To enlighten my colleagues and the general public, I wrote [Numerical Secrets of the Bible](#), BIBAL Press, North Richland Hills, Texas (ISBN 094103767-3). My major publication in this respect is the *quantitative structural analysis* of the Psalms and other selected texts, published on my website: <http://www.labuschagne.nl/psalms.htm>.