

# WHY BÉNÉDICTE LEMMELIJN?

Against the backdrop of the ‘vision’, which became a ‘vision’ and policy plan in 2022-2026 and which remains my horizon, and also in light of the vision text that has been tested by the fire of reality and is now before us for 2026-2030, I would like to take the time to consider a number of qualities, competencies and aspects from my curriculum that demonstrate that I am a suitable candidate for dean.

## 1. From cradle to bedrock...

First of all, I would like to mention that I have ‘known’ the faculty since I was a child; it was, as it were, already present in my cradle. My father was the first administrative secretary of the Higher Institute for Religious Studies in the 1960s, after studying theology himself in Bonn (because as a layman he was not yet allowed to study at our faculty). In 1972, he was one of the first to be ordained as a deacon in the diocese of Hasselt, and after leaving the faculty in 1968, he spent his entire life as a religious education teacher. In that environment, I became familiar from childhood with parish pastoral care, with involvement in the diocese, with diaconal and pastoral councils, with theology as an academic discipline... On the flyleaf of his copy of Otto Eissfeldt’s *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, I wrote ‘papa’ in large angular block letters, even before I could really write... He died a few years ago. I still have the book.

Following in his footsteps, and strengthened in my personal and religious conviction that studying theology – and serving in that context – would pave a meaningful path in life, I started the then first candidacy in Religious Studies at our faculty in 1987, at the age of 17. I have been there ever since, although I have supplemented my learning, studying, reflecting and teaching over the years with a great deal of international experience, especially in the context of South Africa. And at the time I never imagined where this path would lead me and what horizons would open up.

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

In that life context, theology for me has always been an intrinsic intertwining of rational, intellectual and scientific reflection on the one hand, and 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 region and later in my current place of residence), in Flanders (with a great deal of service in the field of science communication and, where appropriate, very often also religious testimony) and, more recently, effective service to the Universal Church following my appointment to the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PCB) and the Scientific Council of AVEPRO. It goes without saying that the latter creates a privileged bond with the Church for me and, as a result, also connects me easily with it.

The fact that these two aspects are intrinsically intertwined for me is also evident from the book I wrote in this context about *Mijn geloof als Bijbelwetenschapper. Een broos en eerlijk antwoord* (Halewijn, November 2016), which won the public prize for religious and spiritual

books in 2017, has since been published in several reprints, became a long-seller, has been translated into Russian, French and English, and has now also been submitted for publication in Spanish. 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 wide audience was published: *Mindful geluk. Vanuit eeuwenoude Bijbelse wijsheid*, which has been a repeated bestseller for Averbode Publishers since 2017, and is now also a long-seller for Otheo, reprinted six times to date.

This broad involvement in the church and society is further expressed, and has been from the outset, in a very extensive commitment to science communication in lectures and in the regular delivery of columns in *Tertio*, *Basis*, *Ezra* and *Golfslag* over many years, and recently also online for Otheo. While being a dean, a collection of these more existential reflections in *Tertio* and *Basis* was published in the autumn of 2022 under the title *Een ogenblik. Gedachten voor de vier seizoenen* (Halewijn, 2022). A collection of the biblical reflections in *Ezra* was published very recently, *Levensecht. Bijbelse mijmeringen* (Otheo, 2025). Finally, the same sometimes meditative view of reality is also reflected in the poetry collections I published as former city poet of my hometown *Zoutleeuw*, in the context of which a selection of poems also encourages people to muse in public places.

This openness and connection with the church and society has also resulted in regular public statements and interviews in the broader media for many years, both internally at KU Leuven (*Veto*, *Campuskrant*, *Areopaag*, ...), more broadly in the church (*K&L*, *Tertio*, *Pastoralia*, etc.) and even more broadly in society (newspapers *HLN*, *BVL*, *De Standaard*, *De Morgen*), as well as audiovisually on radio and TV, and finally also via the internet, for example in *Universiteit van Vlaanderen* or *Dominicanen.tv*. and various podcasts for various initiators (KU Leuven, Otheo, etc.). See also: press contributions sub 'Over ons'.

Finally, it is also reflected in my active and repeated participation in study days and continuing education within the faculty and the university for a wider audience: *Logos*, *Vredesdag*, *Universiteit Derde Leeftijd*, *Lessons for the 21st Century*, *Didache Bible Course*, both in delivering lectures that have led to publication and in organising them.

### **3. Globally recognised scientific research in Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint studies**

In the field of research, drawing on my expertise in textual criticism and editorial criticism of the Old Testament, I head the Centre for Septuagint Studies and Textual Criticism ([https://theo.kuleuven.be/en/research/centres/centr\\_sept/](https://theo.kuleuven.be/en/research/centres/centr_sept/)), in the context of which I have developed a new set of criteria for characterising the translation technique of individual Septuagint books together with my husband and colleague at UCLouvain, Hans Ausloos. These criteria have been elaborated in numerous peer-reviewed scientific articles and contributions. The criteriology is internationally recognised and applied, and is continuously refined and further innovatively developed in the doctoral dissertations based on it, and by colleagues who have since become professors and recognised scholars in numerous places around the world and at KU Leuven itself.

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

My successive and changing service and administrative duties over the past 25 years have not prevented me from continuing to devote myself fully to research. In addition to my membership of various international scientific organisations and editorial boards, here are just two examples: a monograph that has since become a standard work on textual criticism in 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 monograph on the redaction criticism of Ex 7–11 is almost finalised and will be submitted for publication next year. A complete bibliography can be consulted via Lirias and via ‘Publications’ sub ‘Over ons’, including, in recent years, and in addition to a number of reviewed articles, two edited volumes and a co-authored book. Finally, it is worth mentioning that, under my supervision and over the past four years, five PhDs have been successfully defended and students have been able to obtain FWO grants (aspirant and postdoc).

#### **4. Education: versatile and multifaceted**

In the field of education, since 1993 I have taught many different courses on various components and aspects of the study of the Old Testament (first as an assistant, then as a substitute, then as a titular and coordinator), alternating between Dutch-language and international programmes. In addition, I have always taught courses at all levels of our programmes, from candidate to licentiate, from bachelor’s to master’s and research master’s, and in various formats, from lectures to seminars. Finally, since 2002 and until 2022, I have taught various RZL courses to large groups of students every year: initially only in the Faculty of Arts, but since 2010 also in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. Over the years, I have received a great deal of special appreciation for each of these courses. I have also published a handbook in this context.

In 2010-2011, I also took the lead in reorganising the Old Testament course units, shifting from a corpus-oriented to a more diverse method-oriented approach.

In addition, during numerous and lengthy stays abroad as a visiting professor, mainly in South Africa and to a lesser extent in India, I have given many lectures in very diverse contexts, a practice that I have also continued in the context of Erasmus.

Finally, I also acted as co-supervisor in an educational project, ICT in the faculty's educational programmes, IMBEZE (01.10.2003-30.09.2005), attended not only as a participant, but also contributed twice as a 'trainer' within the training programme for new teachers 'Teaching at KU Leuven' (DUO/ICTO), in 2007 and 2008, where I offered a module/lecture on 'Interactive teaching for large groups', based on my broad RZL experience.

## **5. Faculty and university services: experience and responsibility**

As the eldest of five children, I have always been accustomed to caring for others and taking responsibility. During my years studying in high school (Grieks-Latijnse humaniora), I was class representative on more than one occasion. In Leuven, I became an ABAP representative for a time. And afterwards, from the moment of my appointment – or even before that – administrative and service tasks followed one another in varying assignments and constellations. Among other things, I was ombudsperson, secretary of the Permanent Teaching Committee (POC), member of the ZAP evaluation committee, member of the Evaluation Committee (BeCo), vice-dean of Internationalisation, member of the Council for International Policy (RIB), deputy member of the Interfaculty Council for Development Cooperation (IRO), member of the Faculty Board, member of the Research and Doctoral Committee (ODC), representative member for the faculty in the Assemblée Générale of Lumen Vitae, chair of the faculty Committee for Study Allowances, chair of the Advisory Committee for International Students (ACIS), member of the Admissions Committee, academic supervisor for the International Sisters' Community, chair of the Evaluation Committee (BeCo), coordinator of the Research Unit Biblical Studies, member of the Cult 4 expert panel at the FWO for six years and member of its Committee for International Scientific Contacts (CWIC). I have now been Dean of our Faculty for nearly four years and, as such, a member of almost all our administrative bodies, whether as chair or otherwise. At the same time, as dean, I was also a member of the higher university bodies such as the (Bijzonder) Groepsbestuur Humane Wetenschappen, the (Bijzondere) Academische Raad, the Decanenoverleg, but also specifically a member of the Alumni Council, the Jury for the Humanities Pioneer Award, the Jury for the Humanities Society Award, the Resonantieraad Ethics@kuleuven, and numerous other councils and bodies, which enriched my perspective on both the Faculty and the University and greatly nuanced my judgement of both realities.

These varied and multifaceted tasks have profoundly shaped me into who I am today. I became familiar with virtually all aspects of the functioning of our faculty, both at the level of education (POC), research (FWO and ODC) and internationalisation (vice-dean, RIB, IRO, ACIS, Committee for Study Allowances), board and council, and of the university as a whole in its different gremia. I learned to establish contacts and prepare contracts, write projects and prepare vision statements, convene and coordinate meetings, assess and describe personnel files with respect and appreciation, edit self-evaluation reports and pass visits, and last but not least, draw up budgets, manage accounting units and financial funds... "Gepokt en gemazeld, as they say in Dutch; seasoned and battle-hardened.

## **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, a fellow biblical scholar. We have three children, now young adults, 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, together with their partners. And most wonderfully, we have two lovely twin-grandchildren. In consultation with my family, who have been my priority all these years – including in and through all the efforts described above – and with their full support, I am once again standing as candidate for dean today.

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

It is a task that I do not regard as the acquisition of power, but rather as the assumption of intrinsic responsibility, with a view to promoting and stimulating, 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 in particular in the Wisdom Literature that I personally cherish, is understood in a very specific way. True leadership is always earned through genuine authority, not claimed by power. And genuine authority has nothing to do with ‘playing the boss’; it is entirely about mutual respect, about caring for the realisation of optimal opportunities for the harmonious development and fulfilment of fellow human beings, and about creating a nurturing environment for this to unfold. That is the environment I want to try to build, not alone, but together with each of you, each with your own background and horizons, with your own ideas, desires and dreams.

Let me therefore be regarded as a ‘bridge’ between the past and future of our faculty. In light of the vision described above, I want to commit myself to casting beacons of hope for a radically new era that may dawn. Beyond the turn of the tide, anchored in hope.