

Obituary: Professor Andries Gideon van Aarde (25 April 1951 – 25 November 2024)

It is with profound sadness that we announce the passing of Professor Andries Gideon van Aarde, a visionary scholar, mentor, and tireless advocate for justice and inclusivity in both academia and society. Born on 25 April 1951 in Pretoria, South Africa, Professor Van Aarde devoted over 50 years of his life to the University of Pretoria, where he shaped the fields of New Testament studies, theology, and biblical scholarship. He was an esteemed professor, research manager, and senior research fellow, and served with distinction as Chair of the Department of New Testament and Related Literature. His contributions to the university and to South African scholarship remain immeasurable.

Professor Van Aarde's academic journey was marked by an exceptional thirst for knowledge and a deep commitment to critical inquiry. He earned three doctorates from the University of Pretoria: a D Litt in Ancient Languages (Greek), a PhD in History of Ancient Culture, and a DD in New Testament Studies. He also held a Master's in Semitic Languages, as well as numerous academic distinctions. His scholarly output was remarkable, with six monographs, over 50 book chapters, and more than 250 articles, alongside significant contributions to leading academic journals. His works, particularly *Fatherless in Galilee* (2001) and *Jesus, Paul and Matthew* (2020), shaped contemporary theological debates and made a lasting impact on New Testament scholarship, both in South Africa and internationally.

Professor Van Aarde was not only a prolific scholar but also a courageous one. He was known for his boldness in challenging established boundaries in New Testament scholarship, especially with regard to the historical Jesus. His work in this area, and his insistence on examining the historical and cultural contexts of the biblical texts, pushed the boundaries of theological inquiry in South Africa and beyond. He was instrumental in advancing critical conversations on the intersections of theology, history, and culture, especially in relation to marginalized communities, gender issues, and post-apartheid contexts.

As a leader in the scholarly community, Professor Van Aarde served as the Editor of *HTS Theological Studies*, and played a central role in its transformation into an internationally recognized, fully online, open-access platform. His leadership in theological publishing, furthered his commitment to making knowledge accessible to scholars around the world. He was also instrumental in promoting theological scholarship in Africa and building networks of scholars through international collaborations and conference presentations. In this regard, Professor Van Aarde was truly selfless and committed to the greater cause.

Beyond his academic achievements, Professor Van Aarde's legacy is one of compassion, humility, and mentorship. He mentored countless students and colleagues, always encouraging intellectual growth, integrity, and a deep commitment to faith and justice. His leadership and vision helped shape the Department of New Testament and Related Literature at the University of Pretoria into one of the premier academic centers for New Testament studies in Africa. Even in his final years, he worked tirelessly to ensure the best possible future for the department, never losing

sight of his mission to cultivate a generation of scholars equipped to challenge and engage with the complexities of faith in the (post-)modern world.

Professor Van Aarde's impact extended far beyond the walls of academia. He was a staunch advocate for social justice, dedicating his life to addressing the systemic issues of apartheid, inequality, and the marginalization of vulnerable communities. His advocacy for inclusive and compassionate approaches to theology earned him recognition from many, including his peers at the University of Pretoria, where he was acknowledged as one of the institution's foremost contributors to inclusivity during its centennial celebrations.

In the broader scholarly community, Professor Van Aarde's work and influence were widely respected. He was a member of several prestigious professional societies, including the Society of Biblical Literature, the New Testament Society of South Africa, and the Jesus Seminar of the Westar Institute. His international reach was felt across continents, where he was invited to teach and present papers at leading universities and conferences in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Africa. His research was a critical bridge between global scholarship and South African intellectual thought, especially in the realm of biblical hermeneutics and the historical-critical method. Professor Van Aarde's passing leaves a deep void in the hearts of his family, colleagues, students, and the broader academic community. Yet, his intellectual and moral legacy will continue to inspire future generations. His commitment to making knowledge accessible, his advocacy for justice, and his passion for theological scholarship ensure that his work will resonate for many years to come.

The Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria, along with scholars of theology and religion across South Africa and Africa, salute Professor Van Aarde for his monumental contributions. His life and work exemplified a commitment to excellence, humility, and the belief that theological scholarship must always engage with the pressing social and political realities of the world. His legacy, embodied in his students, his publications, and his enduring impact on New Testament studies, will continue to inspire and challenge us all.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family, who have lost a beloved father and mentor. May they find comfort in knowing that his legacy, like the profound truths he sought to uncover, will live on.

Prof. Chris L. de Wet, Department of New Testament and Related Literature
Prof. Dirk J. Human, Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures
Faculty of Theology and Religion
University of Pretoria
Pretoria, South Africa

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