The Life and Contribution of Reverend Doctor Obed Ndeva Obadiah Kealotswe – a Dedication

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Abstract

This dedication presents the life, accomplishments, and contributions of Rev. Dr. Obed Ndeya Obadiah Kealotswe in service of the community, profession, governance, teaching and learning, as well as his research and publications. Kealotswe's contributions and accomplishments in various spheres of life are outstanding.

Keywords: African Independent Churches, new religious movements, ecumenics, systematic theology, Ethiopianism

Introduction

In honor and remembrance of the late Reverend Doctor Obed Ndeya Obadiah Kealotswe, this dedication examines his life and contribution to the academic domain as a scholar in the field of systematic theology, specifically with reference to the African Independent Churches (AICs). This dedication will also unpack his lectureship tenure at the University of Botswana (UB), detailing his excellent contribution to teaching, research, and his publication output, his professional development and contributions to other institutions and the society at large while highlighting how he became a reputable and high caliber scholar at both a local and continental level.

Early Life and Educational Background

Kealotswe who was born on September 6, 1949 hailed from Mapoka village, located in the north-eastern district of Botswana. In 1958 he started his formal education at Nlaphwane Primary School and completed his Primary School Leaving Certificate in 1966 at Mapoka Primary School. He then proceeded to secondary level in St. Joseph's College where he did his Junior Certificate level from 1967 to 1969 and Cambridge level from 1970 to 1971 (UB HR File 2001a).

Kealotswe continued his studies and obtained a diploma in theology at the Morija Theological School in 1975. He concurrently pursued his degree in Bachelor of Arts (Theology) at the National University of Lesotho from 1975 to 1979. He advanced to postgraduate level where he studied Master of Arts in Theology and Religious Studies at the UB from 1985 to 1986, an opportunity that he maximized on after two years of his employment contract with the institution. He embarked on his doctoral journey at the University of Zimbabwe from 1987 until 1990, which unfortunately had to be put to a temporary halt due to the untimely death of his supervisor. As a result of encountering these unforeseen circumstances, Kealotswe transferred to the University of Edinburgh (Scotland), School of Divinity in 1991 where he acquired his Doctor of Philosophy Degree in 1993. Sponsored by an Ecumenical Scholarship Program in Bochum, Germany, and the UB, his doctoral thesis investigated the 'Doctrine and ritual in an African Independent Church in Botswana: A study of the beliefs, rituals and practices of the Head Mountain of God Apostolic Church in Zion' (Kealotswe 1993).

Kealotswe was married to Edzani and blessed with three children, Bantou, Tigele, and Tabitha.

Ministry Service

Ecclesiastically, Kealotswe is recognized for his longstanding service as an ordained pastor of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA). His role as a seasoned active minister of religion in the UCCSA spanned over 36 years from 1979 to 2015. He has served in various congregations in Botswana, leaving an indelible mark on each community.

His ministerial journey began at Francistown Congregational Church, where he was entrusted with a congregation of 150 members from May 1979

to July 1981. His ministry then led him to Gaborone Union Church (Trinity Church) from July 1981 to November 1983 where he served a large congregation of 900 members. From June 1994 to December 1996, he took on the role of minister at Tlokweng Congregational Church, a congregation consisting of 250 members. He then transitioned to Ramotswa Congregational Church where he served as a minister at a small congregation of 55 members from December 1996 to September 2001. Kealotswe's journey continued as he assumed the role of minister at the Thamaga Congregational Church from September 2001 to February 2005, overseeing a congregation of 480 members. From February 2005 to February 2010, he tended to a congregation of 270 members as minister of the Kumakwane Congregational Church.

Not only did his leadership skills and pastoral care continue to flourish but he demonstrated grace and effectiveness in guiding his congregants through fostering spiritual growth and fellowship. His legacy in the UCCSA reflected a lifetime of commitment, service, and spiritual leadership. His ability to connect with congregations of varying sizes showcases his versatility and enduring dedication to the principles of the UCCSA.

Kealotswe's visionary approach to his ministry has inspired him to compile a series of *Guides to Preachers* in 2001 featuring a collection of the major sermons where he preached more than twice a month on various occasions such as memorial services in churches and institutions, installations of chiefs, funerals, tombstone unveilings, wedding ceremonies, conferences, and other church occasions.

Additionally, his influence extended beyond the pulpit as he has made notable accomplishments in contributing to the general church body in terms of functionality and structure. His dedication to the church's governance is evident where he was assisting in the formation of the constitution of the Faith International Pentecostal Church, aiding in its registration process in August 1999. He also played a pivotal role in September 1999 by translating the constitution of the Evangelist Apostolic Prophet Church in Botswana, contributing to the church's organizational clarity. He further compiled a liturgy book for the Revelation Blessed Peace Church in October 1999. His appointment as an active minister of religion showcases his dedication, commitment, and passionate service to the church and the community.

Notably, as part of his service at the UB, he offered pastoral counseling to students who came to him for help especially when they were stressed because of the pressure of heavy academic work and other social and eco-

nomic factors from outside. He also extended his pastoral services to the university community during memorial services as well as the wider community by holding services in and around Gaborone thus contributing tremendously to the spiritual life of his people as a whole. Kealotswe built his reputation and garnered respect among his peers and the Christian community at large during this season of his life.

Employment and Beginning of his Professional Development

Kealotswe joined the UB as a lecturer on August 28, 1983 specializing in systematic theology with particular focus on the AICs. He got promoted to senior lecturer in 2002 (UB HR File 2002a) and served until 2016. From January to June 2016, he occupied the position of Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the UB. His employment contract with the UB lasted for 33 years, where he left an impressive mark on each part of his journey.

Contribution to Teaching and Learning

Kealotswe had a long teaching career at the UB as a lecturer and senior lecturer. He taught at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in different fields and areas of specialization within theology and religious studies. His performance in teaching has been very good as measured by the Student Evaluation of Course and Teacher (SECAT) which has rated him mostly above 4.0 in most courses. The positive assessment from students bore testimony to his vast teaching experience which benefited them greatly.

He had a very heavy teaching load and has taught several courses in the department. He has been able to handle such a heavy teaching load because of his long teaching experience and impressive research output. In terms of the broad areas of specialization, Kealotswe taught the following courses: Christian Spirituality, Christian Education, Homiletics, New Religious Movements, History of Christian Thought, Mission and Evangelism, Systematic Theology Methodological Reflections, Stewardship, Hospital Ministry, Theologies of the African Independent Churches, Christology, Christianity and the Rise of New Religious Movements in Botswana, Religion and Modernity, History of Christianity in Southern Africa, Religion and Science, Religion and Society, Applied Ethics, Introduction to Pastoral Theology, Sociology of Religion, Introduction to Systematic Theology, The

Church: Its Development in Southern Africa, Christian Ethics, and Biblical Exegesis. In the academic year 2004/2005 during Semester 2, he was part of the supervision board of Bachelor of Education students. He was also a research supervisor to postgraduate students, supervising directed research projects of undergraduate students, as well as supervising Diploma of Pastoral Theology students in research (UB HR File 2002b).

His lectures were always meticulously prepared and the course outlines were well detailed in order to enable students to develop a culture of reading independently in the library. He always made sure that course materials were adequate, including the lists of topics, description of the content taught, and brief reading recommendations. His classes were divided into small tutorial groups in order to allow personal attention to weak students. His students were also encouraged to undertake research to enhance their theoretical approaches to their subjects of study.

His method of teaching was not content-based but on the acquisition of skills that would enable students to develop critical, creative, and independent thinking. In fact, most of his students participated enthusiastically in the discussions that followed his lectures, something that showed that the lectures were well understood. Consequently, his teaching method had a great impact on the students who, instead of just cramming facts were able to provide a critical analysis of the issues that were at hand.

Kealotswe was also described as a humorous and creative pedagogist, who kept his students engaged with his tales and anecdotes (cf. Dibeela 2018). In an article written by Nthoi (2022) as a dedication to the memory of the late Kealotswe, Nthoi nicknamed him *MaChristos* because of his humorous ways of teaching Christology. He also called Kealotswe *Shadipinge* because he was a Christian theologian and practicing pastor who sought to embrace his Christianity and African culture.

Apart from being a lecturer at the UB, Kealotswe also engaged in other teaching assignments, e.g., he taught a course called 'Introduction to the Study of the AICs and New Religious Movements (NRMs) in Southern Africa' at the University of Stellenbosch in the Department of Theology in September 1997. He has also facilitated in seminars with students and academic staff at the University of the Free State in 2006, with topics like 'Introduction to African Traditional Religions (ATRs)', 'Southern African theology after 1994', 'The theology of the church in the era of HIV and AIDS', and 'Doing theology in the modern and postmodern world'.

Even from outside the UB, feedback from external examiners have rated Kealotswe very positively. The praise reports about his teaching on all levels reflected Kealotswe as a scholar who fostered academic excellence.

Contribution to Research and Publications Record

Kealotswe's impactful journey reached its pinnacle of academic excellence through his tremendous contribution to research and publications. He was a prolific scholar which is evident from his numerous accomplishments in his research focus and interest, which was systematic theology, with major emphasis on the new theologies of the AICs. He did extensive research on the area of cultural integration in the AICs and other religious movements.

In the years following the completion of his doctorate, Kealotswe carried out extensive research in many parts of Botswana covering a wide range of topics which included Christianity and Tswana culture, healing in the AICs in the era of HIV/AIDS, church and state, the sacred nature of land, as well as the theology of relevant theology for Botswana. He also touched on subjects concerning new religious movements, ecclesiastical history, and expressions of ecumenism in Botswana.

As a result of his extensive experience in research in many parts of the country and in a variety of subjects, Kealotswe has to his credit many articles in refereed journals, book chapters, and books (UB HR File 2017). During his tenure at the UB, he wrote two monographs, co-authored two books with Byaruhanga-Akiiki focusing on the subject of healers and protective medicine in Botswana, and the other focused on the African theology of healing, and co-edited two books focusing on an African context with Amanze and Nkomazana – all who were his colleagues at the UB.

Kealotswe has also written 13 chapters in various books. In these chapters, he delved into topics such as attitudes toward disability, the intersection between law and religion in Africa, theological education in the AICs, the impact of HIV/AIDS, the role of religion in societal transformation, and the relation between music and culture. These works provide critical insights into the dynamic interplay of tradition, spirituality, and contemporary challenges within the African context.

Additionally he published 18 refereed journal articles and eight non-refereed journal articles. In a series of refereed journal articles spanning from 1989 to 2014, Kealotswe delved into diverse subjects, such as the nature and character of the AICs, the impact of Christianity among the Batawana, and

the historical role of the London Missionary Society in shaping the nation-hood in Botswana. Notably, his contributions extend to the intersection of religious teachings with contemporary challenges, examining issues such as HIV/AIDS, moral concerns during epidemics, and the economic implications of the 1968 Land Policy. Additionally, Kealotswe addressed theological perspectives on marriage, biblical interpretation, and healing practices within the context of the AICs.

Kealotswe also made an immense contribution by presenting a total of 41 high quality conference papers at a national, regional, and international level, spanning an extensive period from 1989 to 2016. He participated and presented in conferences in various African countries such as South Africa, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Sierra Leone. He has also participated in conferences in the United Kingdom at the University of Stirling and Liverpool Hope University. His scholarly contributions mostly cover a broad geographic scope addressing issues majorly in Botswana and Southern Africa, which he engaged with from an African context. His conference papers comprehensively explored various aspects of religious and theological dynamics in Botswana and the Southern African region, offering a nuanced perspective on issues ranging from education and healthcare to politics, culture, and the society.

On a national level, Kealotswe has made significant contributions to the academic landscape of the UB through a series of thought-provoking research papers and presentations. He has presented quite a few papers at the Theology and Religious Studies TRS departmental series including 'The biblical concept of land and development in Botswana' (1994), 'The biblical concept of marriage in the era of HIV and AIDS' (1997), 'Church and state in Botswana' (2010), 'Missionary colonialism re-visited: The Bakgatla case' (2012), and 'Ministers of religion and partisan politics in a secular state' (2015). His contributions reflected a multidimensional approach and a dedicated exploration combining historical analysis, sociopolitical reflections, and a nuanced understanding of biblical concepts. Thus it showcased his commitment to scholarly excellence and engagement to pertinent societal issues impacting both the university community and the broader society.

Kealotswe's extensive body of published work reflects a profound engagement underscoring his commitment to advancing knowledge in his research area. Prior to publication, Kealotswe would give some of his completed manuscripts to his colleagues in the department to review as he was very open to comments and suggestions for improvement. This demonstrates how meticulous he was in ensuring that he produces high quality manuscripts.

His research output was so impressive that the American Biographical Institute nominated him as man of the year in 2001 (UB HR File 2001b). The Institute's International Board of Research decided on his nomination due to his overall accomplishment and contribution to society.

Service to the Institution, Profession, and Community

His service to the UB can be divided into three parts: Service to the institution, profession, and community. This is where Kealotswe spent most of his academic life and demonstrated this area as his greatest strengths as he dedicatedly served Botswana and the African continent in his field. This is evident in the way he excellently performed in the areas and spaces mentioned below (UB HR File 2017).

Service at University of Botswana

Kealotswe's service at the UB kicked off with his early involvement in departmental affairs by taking responsibility as the Departmental Board secretary from 1985 to 1987. A few years later, he assumed membership of the Humanities' ad hoc committee on localization in 1995 and joined the student welfare committee from 1996 to 2002, where he actively contributed to the positive wellbeing of the academic community. During that period, he filled various crucial roles that demonstrated his capacity and potential to advance to higher academic leadership positions. From 1996 to 1998, he was the departmental seminars organizer, a responsibility that contributed to fostering intellectual exchange. In 1999, he was an internal examiner where he evaluated Master of Education students. He took on more responsibilities as he was simultaneously the departmental representative at the School of Graduate Studies and departmental coordinator of MA programs from 1999 to 2002. He also served as a member of the Departmental Committee for Semesterization in 2001. These roles reflect Kealotswe as one who added tremendous value to academic governance, particularly in the shaping of postgraduate programs and learning.

About a year after being promoted to Senior Lecturer, in 2002, he was appointed acting head of the Department of Theology and Religious

Studies for a brief period in 2003. From 2007 to 2009, Kealotswe took on the role of departmental tutor and coordinator level 4, contributing to the academic development of students. Also in 2007, he became a member and minute secretary of the Departmental Research and Publications Committee up until 2015 – a long-term membership lasting for 8 years. From 2012 to 2015, he was a member of the Departmental Academic Quality Assurance Committee as well as the Departmental Links Committee. He showcased his commitment to academic related events in 2013 by being a member of the organizing committee for the Tokyo International Conference on African Development Conference, a three-day event that was held at the UB. As a theology unit representative in the Courses Revision Committee of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies in 2015, Kealotswe has actively contributed to the revision of academic courses, ensuring their relevance and quality.

In January 2016, Kealotswe was promoted as the head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the UB where he steered with vision and dedication until his retirement in August 2016. Shortly after his retirement, he seamlessly transitioned to be part of the management team at Kgolagano College where he became the academic dean until his demise in June 2018 (Kgolagano College 2018).

Services to other Universities

Kealotswe's contributions to the academic realm extended beyond the UB. Outside of the UB, he occupied various research positions. His initial engagement with research started in 1997 when he attained a research fellowship at the University of Stellenbosch. During this period, he taught a course introducing the AICs and NRMs in Southern Africa. Additionally, he wrote two noteworthy reports for the University of Stellenbosch, one delving into the history and theology of the AICs in Africa and another on biblical interpretation and theological education in the new South Africa, using Stellenbosch as the case study.

Kealotswe took sabbatical leave in 2006 where he served at the University of the Free State in the Faculty of Theology, Department of Biblical and Religious Studies. During this period, he joined the 2006 University of the Free State Institutional Review towards Excellence and Equity. His membership highlighted a commitment to institutional development and quality assurance. From 2012 to 2016, he returned to the University of the Free State

for a research associate position and in 2016, he assumed a similar position as associate research fellow at UNISA.

Apart from his noteworthy milestones in providing commendable services as a research fellow at South African universities, Kealotswe developed lecture notes for the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Namibia in the year 2000, delving into the intriguing subject of the rise and development of the AICs in Namibia.

His engagement with other universities is a testimony to his scholarly prowess and his dedication to advancing knowledge of the AICs and theological education, contextualizing it to Southern African countries.

Service as an Internal and External Examiner

As part of his vast contribution to his academic profession, Kealotswe executed his expertise in the evaluation of academic work mostly outside the UB. He started off as a moderator for religious education at the Affiliated Institutions of Molepolole College of Education and Tonota College of Education from 1994 to 1996. He also moderated religious education at Tlokweng College of Education from 1999 to 1998. He served as an external examiner for MA dissertations: One from the University of Natal in 1995, as well as from UNISA on two separate occasions: One MA dissertation in 2013 and two in 2014. He also acted as an external examiner for UNISA's doctoral theses in literature and philosophy, one in 2005 and the other in 2012. He internally examined an MA dissertation for the UB in 2013.

These occasions exemplify Kealotswe's commitment to academic scrutiny and consistent dedication to ensuring that the quality and rigor of postgraduate research uphold the required academic standards. Furthermore, his engagement in examinations and moderations attests to his standing as trusted and knowledgeable which added to his wealth of experience.

Kealotswe has significantly contributed to the assessment and advancement of scholarly pursuits. Demonstrating a commitment to rigorous evaluation, he diligently assessed the works of two esteemed academic figures from the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town, Prof. Chidester in June 2015, and Prof. De Gruchy in May 2012, undertaken for South Africa's National Research Foundation. Evaluating his peers' contributions towards religious studies underscores Kealotswe's role in enhancing the academic discourse within the religious studies realm.

Membership in Societies

Kealotswe filled significant leadership roles in ecumenical theological organizations such as the UB, Lesotho, and Swaziland (BOLESWA), the Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (ASRSA), the Association of Theological Institutions in Southern and Central Africa (ATISCA), and others. He has also filled executive leadership positions at these international associations with the highest being his chairpersonship of the African Christianity Project based in Edinburgh (UK) from 1997 to 1998, which reflects his international engagement and leadership in promoting the study of African Christianity. However, his humble beginnings started with serving as the secretary of ATISCA from 1994 to 1996, also doing a second term from 1997 to 1998.

From 2011 to 2015, he filled the role of vice president at ASRSA, while he also was a member of the organizing committee for the ASRSA 37th congress at the University of Johannesburg in 2015, an academic event orchestrated to foster intellectual discourse in the field of religious studies within the academic community. As a member of the BOLESWA committee, Kealotswe was responsible for organizing BOLESWA conferences from time to time on behalf of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the UB.

Other notable examples of his extensive involvement in leadership roles include his collaboration with a junior staff member at the University of Namibia in presenting a joint conference paper in 2015. Additionally, he led through his teaching experiences at the university, such as instructing a course in the 2012/2013 academic year with a Staff Development Fellowship as well as two taught courses in the 2010/2011 academic year with a teaching assistant. These examples demonstrate his commitment to providing mentorship and knowledge sharing in shaping the next generation of scholars, thus fostering a supportive academic environment.

Beyond the university setting, Kealotswe's extensive involvement in various leadership roles further solidified his impact. His multifaceted contributions to the field of religious studies and academia in general underscore his commitment to scholarly excellence and organizational leadership.

Other Professional Services

Kealotswe's contributions to other professional services are reflected as multifaceted, extending beyond the university's boundaries. For instance, he en-

gaged in the compilation of a syllabus for disability studies for ATISCA as an appointee by the Joint Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network and ATISCA Conference in July 2013 at Justo Mwale University College, Lusaka, Zambia. Undertaking this assignment showcases his heart for people with disabilities and support in developing inclusive educational content.

His academic expertise was further expressed in shaping institutional frameworks by assisting several churches in compiling their liturgies and constitutions. He was particularly involved in the compilation of a liturgy book for the Revelation Blessed Peace Church and (as has already been mentioned) the translation of the constitution of the Evangelist Apostolic Prophet Church of Botswana. As has also been mentioned above, Kealotswe played a major role in the formation and registration of the constitution of the Faith International Pentecostal Church, showcasing a longstanding commitment to community and organizational development.

Community Service

Alongside his academic endeavors, Kealotswe emerged as a beacon of community service, weaving a tapestry of contributions that spanned over decades. From the corridors of congregational halls to the heart of societal challenges, Kealotswe's commitment to uplift his community left an indelible mark.

He has significantly contributed to both ecclesiastical and community development, demonstrating a profound commitment to service and leadership. From 1979 to 2015, he served as an active minister of religion within the UCCSA, fulfilling ministerial duties in various congregations, including Mochudi, Oodi, and Gabane from 2013 to 2015.

In 1984, he assumed the role of secretary of the Gaborone Ministers Fraternal and concurrently took charge as the secretary of the Church Radio Council. These early endeavors laid the foundation for his unwavering dedication to encouraging unity and communication within the church community.

His leadership extended beyond religious contexts, with notable roles in committee memberships and organizational governance. Kealotswe served as a member of the ministerial committee of the Kolobeng Regional Council of the UCCSA Synod of Botswana during 2014 and 2015. Additionally, he assumed the responsibilities of chairperson and manager of Humble Gospel Ministries in Dikgonnye Village during the same period.

Kealotswe's engagement in other educational institutions and initiatives is also noteworthy. His tenure as director for training for the ministry of the UCCSA Synod of Botswana spanned from 1993 to 1995 where he steered the ministry towards educational growth while ensuring that the ministers in training were effectively equipped to serve their congregations. This was done along with chairing the Kgolagano College Board of Governors from 1994 to 1996 and subsequently serving as a board member until 2001, leaving a significant mark on the College.

A specific focus of Kealotswe's community outreach has been the dissemination of knowledge and awareness on critical issues. He was actively involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS by participating in debates that have been held both on TV and Radio Botswana intended to make people aware of the dangers of HIV/AIDS to the nation as a whole and how to live with HIV/AIDS if one is tested positive. Moreover, he conducted workshops on HIV and AIDS, actively encouraging Christian communities to adopt a non-stigmatizing stance towards those affected or living with these conditions. He traversed to various locations like Thamaga, Kanye, Bobonong, Letlhakane, and Selibe Phikwe to facilitate these workshops from 2003 to 2005. In so doing, Kealotswe's commendable act is a reflection of his commitment to addressing such societal challenges through education and community engagement that benefitted others in the long run.

Kealotswe continued to empower his community with workshops delving into imperative topics such as 'Being Christians in the modern and postmodern world' (2011) which provided a platform for dialogue and reflection on navigating faith in an ever-evolving society, 'Congregationalism' (2012) which fostered a deeper understanding of the principles that bind the church community together, 'Ministry in the modern world' (2013) with a focus on keeping the ministry relevant in contemporary times, and on HIV and AIDS and drug abuse (2014) aimed at addressing critical issues surrounding the topic at grassroots level.

His involvement also extended to effective media communications within the church community, such as representing the UCCSA Synod of Botswana in the Church Radio Council in 1999. His participation in panel discussions at the UB, Molepolole College of Education, and Mochudi Community Hall organized by the School of Adult Education at the UB in 1997 showcase his dedication to disseminating knowledge about Botswana's

constitution within the community ensuring that they become informed citizens.

Additionally, Kealotswe has contributed to the academic discourse through his article, 'Reading and understanding the Bible from a Botswana perspective' (1997). This demonstrates his commitment to theological scholarship and sharing insights with a broader audience. For several years he has served in the religious panels of the Ministry of Education.

In summary, Kealotswe's rich tapestry of his multifaceted contributions ranges from scholarly pursuits, academic governance on an institutional level from a local, regional, and international level, community engagement, and religious leadership. All these endeavors he embarked on underscore a commendable dedication to both spiritual and societal wellbeing, while embodying the principles of service and leadership. Furthermore, it encapsulates a legacy of dedication to the advancement of the religious studies field within the Southern African region and beyond.

Conclusion

This dedication has demonstrated Kealotswe's encyclopaedic character and immense contribution to theological studies both within the UB and outside the institution. He demonstrated an excellent performance and built a strong reputation as a wholistic academic in his specialty in AICs in the field of Theology and Religious Studies. His contributions reflect a life dedicated to community service, education, and addressing societal challenges. His story is not just a narrative of individual accomplishments but an impactful journey that is indeed a testimony to the transformative power of selfless service in creating a better society.

At the time of his departure in June 2018, he was the Academic Dean of Kgolagano College. May his soul continue to rest in peace.

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