

# Six powerful contemporary tendencies secularising Christian higher education:

Social Darwinist competition, scientific technicism, neo-pragmatic relativism, valuism, intolerance and churchism

*B.J. van der Walt*  
*School for Philosophy*  
*Potchefstroom Campus*  
*North-West University*  
*Potchefstroom*  
*benniejvanderwalt@gmail.com*

## Opsomming

*Ses kragtige hedendaagse tendense wat die sekularisering van Christelike hoër onderwys bevorder: Sosiaal-Darwinistiese kompetisie, scientistiese tegnisme, neo-pragmatistiese, relativisme, waardeverabsoltering, onverdraagsaamheid en kerkgesentreerdheid*

*Hierdie (vierde) artikel sluit aan by die vorige drie bydraes in hierdie tydskrif wat agtereenvolgens die volgende aan die orde gestel het (vgl. Van der Walt, 2014a, 2014b en 2014c): (1) Die basiese vereistes vir 'n Christelike akademiese instelling. (2) Daarna is die verhaal vertel van hoe die eertydse Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys (PU vir CHO) binne 'n kort tydperk tot 'n min of meer sekulêre instelling getransformeer is. (3) Vervolgens is twee invloedryke hedendaagse ideologieë, ekonomisme en bestuursoutokrasie ("managerialism"), ondersoek, wat volgens die skrywer moontlik sleutelrolle gedurende die laaste fases van die geskiedenis van die PU kon gespeel het.*

*In hierdie laaste artikel in die reeks word die eie interpretasie van die PU-geskiedenis voortgesit deur op nog ses belangrike tendense te let wat tot die sekularisering van hierdie vroeëre Christelike instelling kon meegewerk het. Agtereenvolgens word die volgende behandel: (1) neo-Darwinistiese kompetisie, (2) scientistiese tegnisme, (3) neo-pragmatistiese relativisme, (4) die myns insiens misplaasde vertroue op waardes om enigsins rigting of koers te probeer hou, (5) die gangbare idee van toleransie wat in sy boesem die kiem van onverdraagsaamheid mag bevat. Vervolgens (6) word gelet op die rol van 'n eng kerkgesentreerde visie by baie Christen akademici – wat daartoe gelei het dat die breëre koninkryksvisie van die Skrif geleidelik verlore geraak het. As gevolg van 'n dualistiese visie van die aardse (natuurlike) teenoor die geestelike (bonatuurlike) was Christene ook nie bewus van die groot gevaar van die toenemende sekularisme nie. Hulle was gewoon daaraan om 'n gesplete bestaan te voer tussen, aan die een kant 'n persoonlike en kerklike vroom godsdienstige lewe en aan die ander kant, 'n sogenaamde neutrale openbare lewe. 'n Outentieke profetiese stem in die breë samelewing het dus ontbreek. In die lig daarvan word gepleit vir Christelike onderwys en instellings wat wel deur kerke tot stand gebring en ondersteun mag word, maar – ter wille van die behoud van 'n breër koninkryksvisie – hulle interne onafhanklikheid behou. (7) Die artikel word afgesluit met moontlike reaksies van die lesers, maar terselfdertyd met die oproep tot verdere nadenke, asook die noodsaaklikheid van 'n passievolle visie vir Christelike hoër onderwys op ons Afrika-kontinent.*

## 1. Introduction: An overview of the previous articles and the present one

This article completes three previous contributions in this journal (cf. Van der Walt, 2014a, 2014b and 2014c) in which the following were discussed: (1) The basic requirements for a Christian academic (tertiary) institution. (2) This was followed by narrating the history of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PU for CHE) which was, within a short period, transformed into a more or less secular institution. (3) Since the writer is of the opinion that they could have played key roles during the last phases of the history of the PU (since 2004 renamed as the North-West University), the focus in the third article was on two prominent contemporary ideologies, viz. economism (leading to the commercialisation also of universities) and its closely related managerialism.

In this final article of the series more tendencies are detected and analysed that may have influenced the lamentable road the PU travelled. The following six factors are discussed: (1) neo-Darwinist competition; (2) scientific technicism; (3) neo-pragmatist relativism; (4) a too high expectation that values can remedy what is basically wrong and can provide direction; (5) the current idea about the tolerance of every viewpoint which, because of its selective character (everything except Christian viewpoints are tolerated), may easily turn into intolerance. Finally (6) the question is asked why individual Christians and churches did not fulfil their responsibility in at least trying to prevent the PU from being secularised. According to the author the main reason for this sad state of affairs was a loss of the Scriptural kingdom vision (of all of life is religion), replaced by different types of dualistic Christian worldviews. As a result of such a distinction between the profane/natural and the sacred/supernatural, Christians and their churches were either not aware of the danger of secularism – the seed of which were already present in the dualistic worldview itself. Or they were satisfied with pious personal and ecclesiastical Christian behaviour next to a so-called neutral but in fact secular way of public life. The article is (7) concluded with three possible reactions (on its contents and the viewpoint it reflects) by its original audience. It also encourages its present readers to keep their vision and passion for Christian higher education on the African continent alive.

The first ideological tendency requiring our attention is:

## 2. Social neo-Darwinist competition regarded as excellence

Closely related to neo-capitalism (see previous article) is the social Darwinist idea of relentless competition, acknowledging only the fittest who succeed in surviving (cf. Griffiths, 1984: 102-104; Hermans, 2003 and Venter, 1996). It boils down to the right of the strongest (cf. Mayr, 1992). As we will soon see, the fittest is also regarded as excellent, revealing real quality. (For details about neo-Darwinist doctrines, cf. Strauss, 2008 and 2009a.)

### 2.1 Only aims and means – no guiding norms

But how does one determine quality? The only answer the international auditors of the PU could provide was the following: You simply have to apply as best you can the (mostly economic?) *means* to be able to reach your own *aims*. But, one may ask, what will prevent the aims from determining the means applied? To my mind this will contradict the whole biblical message that norms should determine our aims as well as the means employed.

The normative emptiness and lack of direction of this kind of competition is evident. Actually there are not – like in an ordinary competition – certain rules of the game to be followed. (The few “rules” that may be formulated to look a little bit more “ethical” are mostly not applied.) Like wild animals, humans have to compete brutally with one another to win. The strongest (= the excellent) will survive. And if the weakest suffer, they only have to blame themselves – to be loved and therefore cared for (the biblical command) would be secular heresy.

### 2.2 Excellence interpreted as the most competitive

But let us for a moment have a closer look of this idea of “excellence” (one of the three values of the PU during the third regime). To me it is simply an unfounded belief, a delusion that competition – rather than co-operation – necessarily produces excellence (cf. Pennings, Farrell, Kamphof & Loenen, 1993:7-25; Readings, 1997; Van der Walt, 2006:102 and Venter 2006a). When I mention in the above publication (2006) ten reasons why competition may also be a bad thing, please note that I am not against excellence as such, neither should a Christian institution disregard quality. The problem here is that excellence as well as “efficiency” is again interpreted with economic spectacles.

My personal view is that different human activities should simultaneously be subjected to different norms and not only to one (the economic). *Economic* efficiency as such does not guarantee *academic* efficiency/excellence. In each societal relationship we should look for *appropriate* kinds of excellence/efficiency strengthening it (cf. also Lategan, 2004, 2005).

### 2.3 Quantification as unquestionable norm

If one accepts no higher norms, the only option left for *measuring* excellence is again quantification. One example will suffice. Another international managerial strategy (again imported via the Vrije Universiteit) was the system to restructure the PU according to schools – called “cost centres” – replacing the previous faculties. (Needless to say that the cost was huge in terms of energy, time and money.)

The outcome of it all was that schools with the greatest number of students, research teams and research articles (producing the most money) are now viewed as the most excellent. (“The bigger the better.”) They are rewarded at an annual ceremony for successfully competing and winning – for their “excellence”. Added to this is the fact that for a research article published overseas (again revealing the misguided dogma of internationalisation)

the writer(s) will receive three times the amount allocated to a local (South African) publication. Are any questions asked about the relevance of such an article for Africa?

Let me briefly say something about the following five red warning lights. The next one is the belief that

## 3. Scientism and technicism will save the world

Scientism (an absolutisation of abstract, scholarly knowledge) was a temptation right from the beginning of Western culture, already in ancient Greek philosophy. (Cf. Bos, 1987 for more on the history of the ideology of rationalism behind scientism.) Modern and contemporary rationalism merely strengthened this rationalistic tendency (cf. Klapwijk, 1986:24ff; Venter, 2006b and 2006c).

From a genuine Reformational perspective many critical studies have been published on both scientism, technicism and technocracy by inter alia Hart (1968:37-61); Van der Hoeven (1980:49-64); Monsma, Christians, Dykema, Leegwater Schuurman & Van Poolen (1986); Rossouw (1993) and Schuurman (in 1995 and in other works).

### 3.1 What scientism implies

For valuable introductions into what scientism entails Mekkes (2010) and Runner (1982:122-157) can still be recommended. They mention the following characteristics.

#### 3.1.1 Reversing the real order

Scientism reverses the natural order by regarding *pre-scientific* life experience as *un-scientific* and thus worthless. In actual fact our prescientific or naïve experience precedes our scholarly, abstract knowledge (cf. Blokhuis, 1985). Scientism is impoverishing by denying the everyday wisdom of ages (cf. Kok, 2004:57 ff.).

#### 3.1.2 A pseudo-revelation and deceptive norms

Mekkes (2010) convincingly indicates that, throughout Western thinking, after rejecting God’s threefold revelation (in creation, subsequently in a written form in the Bible, and finally incarnated in Christ as a human being), non-Christian thinking replaced it with their own philosophy and scholarship as pseudo-revelation.

This deep religious rebellion was driven by the aspiration of the human being to be god him-/herself, believing Satan's lie (cf. Gen. 3:4). It furthermore implied the rejection of God as the giver of laws or normative directions for life. Man becomes a law unto himself (autonomous), not realising that autonomy is a myth (cf. Maneschijn, 1996). The seat of this kind of subjective normativity was believed to be the absolutised human intellect (called "Reason"), providing direction and salvation for all of life. These erroneous ideas are continued in modern irrationalism and so-called postmodernism, and forms the basis of today's scientism.

Scientism, therefore, is a faith, a substitution of true religion. It knows what "sin" is (a lack of academic knowledge, causing our problems) and also has its own idea of redemption (the rigorous application of the sciences).

### 3.1.3 *Everyday examples*

This kind of faith is today no longer confined to studies, classrooms and laboratories, but has infiltrated our entire culture. I need only to mention the following examples: According to the media we should have a scientific breakfast, a scientifically tested toothpaste and toothbrush, scientific sex education at schools, scientifically directed family planning, etcetera. Advertisers also try to sell their products based on the – sometimes dubious – claim that these products have been scientifically tested and proved to be 100% effective. Even wars are scientifically fought! Suppressing ideologies may also boost their power over people by claiming to be scientific. However, the actual fact is that scientific results are as fallible – and sometimes dangerous – as any other human endeavour (cf. Van Maanen, 1991).

Scientism is also many-headed since it has influenced every discipline. Examples are biologism, psychologism, logicism, economism and many more. Theologism identifies knowledge of God with theology (= the science about God). In this way Christian religion and faith are down-sized to something merely scientific. The Bible is the powerful, pre-scientific Word of God and not a scientific text. If the Truth about God is identified with theology, how could a theology be reformed, by what standard or norm?

### 3.1.4 *Students are the victims of this "gospel"*

Our academies can very quickly influence young, inexperienced Christian students since scientism is taken for granted and not exposed to what it really is – a deep faith. This can happen in spite of regular chapel attendance and prayer meetings, especially when a pietistic gospel is preached and practised.

The pursuit of science is one thing; to adopt a scientific view is quite another. Scientific work then becomes a substitute to faith. However, our pre-scientific belief in God and his Word not only *precedes* our scholarly work, but should also *determine* it from the beginning.

## 3.2 *The dominance of the paradigm of the technistic natural sciences*

Today scholarly work is dominated to a large extent by the technistic paradigm of the natural sciences (cf. Dijksterhuis, 1950; Simons, 2011 and Strijbos, 1988). Mathematics, physics, chemistry, medicine and economics (especially in their applied forms) are viewed as important for a skilled workforce in the economy, while the arts and humanities are often marginalised by receiving less government subsidy or even being terminated. In a recent news report it was announced that the South African government will subsidise the first group (of natural sciences) up to 80%, but the last group (the humanities) with only 20%.

It is part of the secularist scientific belief system that this one-eyed way of doing science (both ontologically and methodologically reductionistic) will save the world – including the detrimental results of such an approach itself! In spite of their blinkers, natural scientists will even have to solve our numerous human and social problems in (South) Africa. (This may be the reason why an astrophysicist, when he attained an A-rating from the National Research Foundation of SA, received as a gift from his university an amount of about R500,000-00, while a philosopher received only R2000-00 when awarded the Stals-Award of the South African Academy for Science and Arts.)

### 3.3 Mostly interested in the "how can?" and not the "why should?" questions

Techniques are also methods but not all methods are techniques. Though both of them are by no means neutral, techniques are mostly regarded as such since they are already proven, well-tried methods, can be easily applied and provide predictable, quick and fruitful results. Technicism will therefore emphasise efficiency.

#### 3.3.1 Mainly interested in the "how?"

Thus technicians usually ask the *how?*-question and not very often *why?* And sometimes even less whether what *can* be done, *may* or *should* also be done. Western technicism furthermore ignores age-old traditional wisdom. A Western trained agriculturalist with a PhD behind his/her name is not necessarily wise in an African context. Many examples of failed Western development projects in Africa can be mentioned.

#### 3.3.2 Worshipping a secular trinity

Technicism increasingly reveals a semi-religious nature. Apart from Christians, it is acknowledged also by non-Christian writers today that economics, science and technology combined have become a contemporary worldwide religion, worshipping a secular kind of trinity.

Some words about the next (third) warning signal:

## 4. Neo-pragmatist postmodern relativism

Neo-capitalism (profit as the only norm), social Darwinism (the survival of the fittest as the sole criterion), pragmatism (utility as final guideline) and postmodernism (all norms are relative) can easily become bed-fellows.

### 4.1 Truth is only what is useful

We are in the fortunate position to be well-equipped with critical Reformational literature analysing (neo-)pragmatism (cf. e.g. Clark, 1960 & 1963; Hart, 1966; 1968:21-35; Klapwijk, 1986:116-118; Venter, 1990:114 ff and Zuidema, 1961:133-158). The basic pragmatist ideology is that reason should be in the service of practical life. Truth is instrumental and operational. Everything in life – including religion and scholarship – is only true when it is verified as useful and profitable.

### 4.2 Postmodernism merely providing the vacuum for different ideologies

To understand the role of postmodernism in today's culture I recommend the delightful book by Lyon (2000). Because of this cultural milieu many Christian thinkers today became advocates of so-called postmodernism as a viable worldview.

#### 4.2.1 Postmodernism merely fills the vacuum

Many writers, however, express their doubt whether postmodernism is something totally new. Schuurman (1995:141) already saw the close alliance between technicism and postmodernism. Nürnberger (2007:12) agrees: postmodernism is simply modernism taken to its extreme. It links up closely with modernist materialism and hedonism, the commercial motivation of modernity. Furthermore postmodern relativism still believes in human autonomy (cf. Middleton & Walsch, 1995:41) and merely makes neo-capitalism, social Darwinism, pragmatism, scientism and technicism more acceptable.

I therefore disagree with the idea that with the arrival of postmodernism we have reached the end of all ideologies. If not an ideology itself (rejecting every grand narrative except its own, viz. that all other narratives are relative), postmodernism at least provides the vacuum to invite all kinds of other powerful, misleading ideologies.

#### 4.2.2 Rejecting Christian education

This may be another reason why the PU was so easily and quickly secularised. May it serve as a warning to every Christian higher educational institution in Africa to be critical about postmodern Western internationalisation. A postmodern view of higher education may, for instance, argue that there is no durable structure and task for a university or that a Christian educational institution is a prime example of an oppressive, indoctrinating grand narrative.

Our (fourth) caution deals with:

## 5. Values as a panacea

Like all other human creations universities (both in the South, West and the North) are not perfect institutions, but subject to all kinds of wrong behaviour. As we have seen (see previous article), many of them are the results of the

market's shaping of higher education. Hamilton (2002) describes some of these ills and pleads for an *academic* ethics applicable to sponsors, managers, teachers and students to rescue "the university in ruins" (Readings, 1997). Very often today added values are also regarded as the solution to many academic ills. (One should, of course, not reject all such efforts out of hand. Cf. Hegeman, Edgell & Jochemsen, 2011.)

### 5.1 Adding values as a solution

Also imported from the international (economic) world and the Vrije Universiteit was the effort to cover up the already described disaster at the PU with a bit of "icing sugar" on top. During the third regime the PU received three vague values. During the succeeding regime the NWU staff had to accept a whole container of ten to eleven values! Some people simply ignored these values, while others were annoyed being treated like kids in a nursery school.

### 5.2 Mere "icing on the cake" – no inner transformation

I have traced the historical origins and nature of values (cf. Van der Walt, 2010a) and with other academics at the PU also commented critically on the values advocated for the PU (cf. Van der Walt, 2010b and Venter, 1994:272-274; 2006a). In principle the problem with values is the following. They are the subjective *results* of either obeying or disobeying more fundamental God-given norms. They should, therefore, also be judged normatively. To my mind they are not really capable of showing correct and clear direction, or of reforming from *within* what is wrong, but merely *add* a superficial decoration at the *outside*, sometimes even to make what is wrong more palatable. Thus values can be misused or interpreted to promote the ideological tendencies already rejected above. For this kind of misplaced trust on values I have coined my own word, viz. "valuism" (cf. Subtitle of this article).

My next (fifth) uneasiness is about:

## 6. The intolerance of secular so-called tolerance

As already indicated, some writers draw attention to the existence of a modern secular religion, worshipping – also in the academy – the unholy trinity of economism, scientism and technicism. In the light of contemporary postmodernism one may even say that today the university – the new temple – has become a pantheon: salvation is expected from a variety of idols (polytheism). As the pragmatist, William James, advised already in the

previous century: If it is useful to have any god, by all means have one, or (today) as many as you may need to achieve your goals!

### 6.1 An example from the PU

Let me provide a last example to indicate why I regard the erstwhile PU and the new NWU as irredeemable as a Christian university. (The only option left is perhaps to start a new Institute for Christian Scholarship outside the NWU.) Previously two compulsory courses were offered to all undergraduate students during their second and third years of study. The first course introduced them to a Christian worldview and the second to the theoretical-philosophical foundations of their major discipline(s) for a degree.

#### 6.1.1 (Mis)understanding one's world

After 2004 these courses were recomposed to two compulsory courses titled *Understanding your world*. As far as I could ascertain these courses were mainly designed according to a (phenomenological?) comparison of religions and worldviews. In practice it boils down to the following. The lecturer has to "bracket" his own worldview (= pretending neutrality) while he introduces his/her students to all kinds of worldviews and philosophies of science. Immature Christian students then either have to look for a (non-existent) "common core" in all worldviews acceptable to all "reasonable" people, or have a free choice from the various perspectives presented by their lecturer. This is a typical postmodern relativist attitude prompting individual choice:

In principle all kinds of spirituality are accessible and acceptable. From the vast variety on offer, one picks and chooses what seems exciting, and drops it when it is no longer fun. Postmodernism is a spending spree in the religious shopping mall (Nünberger, 2007:12).

Leaving it to the student to choose is, however, to me the easy way out: we end by capitulating to a false sense of neutrality.

#### 6.1.2 An age-old problem

It is, by the way, interesting to realise that the issue at hand is not really new, typical of postmodernism. Already Reformational thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, like Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876), had to struggle against it for the sake of freedom of conscience and expression in education.

At the time of Van Prinsterer, influenced by Enlightenment philosophy, schooling was regarded as the prerogative of the state. The Dutch government established public schools which had to be non-sectarian or religiously neutral. It was supposed that with such kind of arrangement nobody (Protestant, Roman Catholic or Jewish parents) would be offended in their religious sentiments. A so-called rational morality (acceptable to all "reasonable" people) should be taught and a clergyman may be allowed to give some "religious instruction" – also of a dubious nature, since not all church ministers at that time (under the influence of a rationalistic secular philosophy) any longer accepted the Bible as the fully authoritative Word of God. However, according to Van Dyke (1989:58, 59) Van Prinsterer's reaction to this system was the following:

Exactly contrary to the intention of the legislator ... the system of 1806 did not *respect* but rather *affronted* the religious sensibilities of earnest Protestants and Catholics. The common school had degenerated into a place of instruction that was based not on commonly held Christian beliefs but on common *unbelief* and *indifference* [italics added]. Nor would the addition of an extra hour of religious instruction by a clergyman remedy the situation, for religious teaching was the soul and basis of nurture, not an isolated part of instruction. Therefore ... there was an unbreakable connection between freedom of conscience, freedom of worship and freedom of education.

### 6.1.3 *The democratic way of death*

What renders the approach of a "neutral" *Understanding your world* course even more questionable is that every lecturer, whatever her/his religious commitment, is entitled to offer these courses. The reason is that it is today regarded as against the country's laws, as discriminatory, to enquire about any academic's religious-worldviewish orientation when interviewed for a vacancy at the NWU. In our democratic societies of today many people are not able any more to distinguish between truth and appearance, insight and opinion, tolerance and indifference, good and evil. Hart (1967:8) calls this not the "democratic way of *life*", but rather the "democratic way of *death*":

We want to have room for all and are proud of our representational broadness. The one's for whom we do not have room are those who have understood the radical character of the Gospel... We can overcome our idolatry of softness only when we learn again to fear God and the consequences of true obedience (cf. also Olthuis *et al.*, 1970:33).

## 6.2 *The unacceptable result*

Just imagine the irreparable spiritual damage done to the lives of young people (students) from Christian homes – including adherents of other religions – to be taught by atheists and agnostics (now also on the academic staff of the NWU) how to (mis)understand yourself and the world around you. Since we know that even an atheist *holds* to some kind of last security, an agnostic *believes* in nothing, and a postmodernist *accepts* everything, the disaster of *Understanding your world* becomes evident. (Cf. in this regard Sire, 1993.)

What makes the situation even more lamentable to me as a Christian is the growing evidence that the NWU is trying to distance itself from possible Christian influence, regarding it as "indoctrination". (In the School of Philosophy and the Faculty of Theology it is still acceptable to be open about your Christian belief, but how long will they be able to resist secular domination?) Is this not a clear example of the intolerance of the so-called secular tolerance of every viewpoint? (Cf. Van der Walt, 2011a:503-515.) According to Volf (2011:132) most violence in the twentieth century (e.g. in countries like Germany, Russia and China) were perpetrated in the name of secular causes.

On the issue of the actual intolerance of the so-called tolerance of all viewpoints I further recommend the following reading list: Carson (2012), Gaede (1993), Mouw (1992) and Kuiper (2001).

## 6.3 *No easy solution*

The above comments do not imply that courses like *Understanding your world* – especially when an appropriate methodology could be designed to avoid relativist dangers – could not have benefits. To help one's students to grasp something about other worldviews and cultures than their own are of vital importance in today's global multi-religious and -cultural global village. (Wilkens & Stanford, 2009 offer a good example.)

In spite of the foregoing comments, Christians have to face the fact that today most, if not all, universities in South Africa and elsewhere in the world are public state institutions, secular in nature. They have to accommodate a growing multireligious and multicultural world. If we as Christians are not in a position to erect our own private educational Christian institutions, what then should be our duty? This important question brings us back to the issue of how to deal with this phenomenon of plurality in a responsible way.

## 7. The challenge of directional pluralism in the public square

Vollenhoven's systematic philosophy (cf. 2005:24 ff) and Mouw & Griffioen's (1993:17, 18) elaboration may be helpful in this regard. According to Vollenhoven and his followers the following three determinants of created reality should be distinguished: (1) the "this and that" of individual things or entities (called the *contextual* by Mouw & Griffioen); (2) the "such and so" determinant of about fifteen different modalities or aspects of concrete things or entities (indicated as the *structural* by Mouw & Griffioen); (3) the "good or bad" distinction (the *directional*, religious and worldviewish determinant).

### 7.1 Distinguishing between plurality and pluralism

One should not absolutise them, but could have no objection against acknowledging the first two pluralities, viz. the contextual and modal, since they are simply facts of reality to be accepted. But to condone directional pluralism is not so easy for people committed to a specific religion or worldview. But before we arrive to a possible solution for this difficulty, we first need to understand more about these three determinants of created reality.

### 7.2 The three pluralities explained

Firstly, the "this and that" of *contextual plurality* draws our attention to different individual things, persons, communities and cultures. Contextual pluralism should therefore not be confined to cultural pluralities. Cultural diversity is usually a mixture of all three kinds of pluralities.

Secondly, we have *structural plurality* in which the distinction between fifteen modalities serves as a method of analysis and is closely related to the Reformational idea of sphere sovereignty. Briefly it boils down to the following. Each social institution is modally differently qualified. The state, for instance, is a public legal institution, a business is economically qualified, a university is an academic institution, a church is characterised by its common faith commitment, a marriage is an ethical relationship of mutual fidelity, etcetera.

The implication is that society is a kind of federation of spheres, all with their own legal competence or "autonomy". Therefore the state is not a kind of all-encompassing institution, but only one of the many social spheres. The right to arrange their own internal affairs is thus not *granted* to the remaining social structures by either the church or the state or today by the economic

world. This principle of sphere sovereignty is not grounded in a humanly constructed, overarching institution, but in the sovereignty of God.

Of course a family has interests in the school attended by its children. And the church and state are not isolated from educational institutions since its members and citizens are involved. But neither the family, church, the state nor the world of economics should be allowed to interfere unnecessarily in the educational domain. If it occurs, the academic freedom of a university is jeopardised.

Thirdly, we have to reckon with the *directional plurality* of various religions, worldviews and ideologies. Religion is one's deepest heart commitment. A worldview (and ideologies as derailed worldviews) implies the direction of one's religious commitment towards the outside world and displays the following four characteristics: (1) Like a map or GPS it indicates a course to be followed. (In biblical terms the correct way or right path that will render good fruits.) (2) It encourages one to pursue the course of your deepest heart commitment. (3) It integrates one's experience so that things do not fall apart, but fall into place. (4) It strives for public recognition. This means firstly, that it does not intend to be secretive, but open and, secondly, that it wants to contribute to the public good. A worldview, therefore, catapults one's deepest private convictions into the so-called public domain.

### 7.3 An illustration

The above exposition may be clarified with the following example of a marriage relationship. Firstly, it consists of two persons with sometimes quite different backgrounds and places of origin (its *contextual* aspects). Secondly, the pledging of mutual troth to each other is essential (its *structural* ethical qualification). Marriage is, in spite of its close relationship to family, school, church etc., different from all these.

What about the *directional* aspect of a marriage? It is advisable that the two partners should share the same religious and worldview convictions. But it is also possible that a marriage can survive without complete unanimity. They may share the same bed, but, as a proverb says, have different dreams and religious orientations. It is the institution of marriage that keeps them together. Stated differently: the *structure* complements what the *direction* lacks.

The same can be said about the state. It is a myth that the modern democratic state should require a unanimous religion, worldview or ideology among all its citizens. The state as a public legal entity should accommodate dissension between its citizens.

#### 7.4 *Wrong approaches*

Very often the distinction between the three kinds of plurality is not honoured and also becomes mixed up. A common approach today is that the plurality of directional viewpoints (worldviews and ideologies) is relegated to so-called private life. However, in "public life" the "Babel of voices" has to be brought under control by a secular state. Also many Christians (the more liberal ones) adapt to this viewpoint or they withdraw from the public square, content as a minority voice with the *status quo*.

Other (the more conservative) Christians, however, strive to push their own world view convictions in a rather undemocratic way onto politics, without much consideration for the other citizens of the same state. They simply try to negate directional plurality.

#### 7.5 *A better approach*

Neither of the two attitudes (adaptation or negation) is satisfactory. We have no choice but to accept that today, in our multi-religious society there will be a continuous battle between different worldviews in the public realm – including the public university. The different worldviews and ideologies will have to compete among themselves, to gain the allegiance of the hearts and minds of the broader public.

Since the state is a public-legal institution which has to balance the interests of a variety of citizens in a fair way, it should not be partial in this strife between different convictions, but recognise and allow them all – also at state universities.

#### 7.6 *A way to influence social life*

The next logical question is: How then can Christians, but also people of other religious orientations, influence the public marketplace?

Here we return to what was mentioned in a previous article, viz. a confessional pluralistic approach. When the option of private Christian schools is not possible, Christian parents' and/or teachers' societies should endeavour to influence primary and secondary secular education.

The same can be done through an association/organisation/foundation/institute for Christian higher education. Examples in South Africa are the Association for Christian Higher Education (VCHO) in Bloemfontein or the Academy for Reformational Education and Studies (AROS) in Pretoria.

In the case of politics Christians can get organised into Christian political parties, which have to gain public recognition for the stance they embody,

trying to influence the direction in which the structure of the state is being realised. This should be possible since we all share the institution (structure) of the state in spite of the multiplicity of the citizens' viewpoints. I have, therefore, emphasised (cf. Van der Walt, 2007:297-318) the urgent need for Christian organisations and institutions – something still totally underestimated in our growing secular environment – in the past and would like to repeat my wake-up call here again.

The last (sixth) issue requiring our attention is the role the churches could have played in preventing the secularisation of the erstwhile PU for CHE.

## 8. The failed role of the church

Previously in this series of four articles the baffling question was already asked why there was so little objection against the path which the PU took. Could not at least the churches have raised their prophetic voice? What did the Reformed Church of SA (which established and supported the PU throughout all the years) had to say or do? Was this church (and other reformed churches) itself already influenced to such an extent by the various ideologies discussed above that it simply quietly accepted the demise of the PU? Did they blindly trust the leaders of the PU since most of them were members of the Reformed Church? All these factors may have played a part, but we should not be satisfied with those explanations alone but look for more fundamental reasons.

The Bible does not only encourage us to test the spirits driving the world *outside* the church, but to do the same regarding the spirits directing the church from the *inside*. (Many Christians are not aware of the warning in 1 John 2:19 that, in the last days – in which we are already living – the antichrists will be coming not from outside but from inside the church itself.)

Apart from what happened to the PU such a litmus test is also needed in the case of other African churches. The reason being that most of the many new Christian schools, colleges and universities at the moment established on our continent are closely related to different ecclesiastical denominations.

### 8.1 *The real disease of many churches*

Stated in a nutshell, the real disease is that most of our churches have never had or have lost their vision of the kingdom of God. As mentioned already previously this malady is caused by a churchistic worldview dividing reality into nature (= creation or this world) and supernatural (= redemption

or heaven represented by the church). I have called this kind of worldview "churchism" (cf. Title of this article).

Kok (1998:93, 94) correctly states that such a nature-grace synthesis eventually produced conditions for a process of secularisation. Even amongst Reformed Christians today there are definite hangovers from such a nature/grace, secular/sacred mentality.

The implications of this unbiblical view may explain the silence of the churches in South Africa while the PU went down the secular drain. May it serve as a warning to any other existing or to be established Christian educational institution elsewhere in Africa.

## 8.2 The unbiblical fruits

The following are the consequences of this brainwashing dualistic worldview:

- The first result is that, because God's encompassing kingdom is identified with one societal relationship (the church), Christian belief and action are limited to the church as institution.
- Next, the Christian's relationship to the rest of the world becomes a problem. Should s/he try to get out of the world (becomes a cultural pessimist or verticalist) or accommodate to it (a cultural optimist or horizontalist)? How can the church today be in touch with a secularised world untouched by the Gospel?
- When the unquestioned assumption is that both realms (of the so-called natural and supernatural) have a real and legitimate existence in God's creation, one does not only see an *a priori* split in reality, but also acts according to one's double-focussed spectacles – even being unaware of it. (The two realms are usually not regarded as of equal value, but both of them do have at least a relative right of existence.)
- The next step is that the captives of such a divided heart commitment are placed under two clashing normativities – the unity of the law of God's kingdom is broken and its radical demands downplayed. Christians are then forced to choose between the false dilemma of either verticalism (mainly directed at God, the church and life hereafter) or horizontalism (mainly concerned about this present world). This explains the difference and struggle between, on the one hand, evangelical movements (mainly choosing for the first horn of the dilemma, viz. grace or redemption and church, with limited involvement in so-called secular issues) and, on the other hand, the ecumenical direction (emphasising in the dialectic relationship between nature and grace the second pole, viz. nature or creation). (Discussed by Van der Walt, 2011b in more detail.)

- This is usually accompanied by hypocrisy. (Especially in those dualistic worldviews, like that of some Reformed churches that emphasise the supernatural.) Hypocrisy is not meant here in the usual sense of insincerity or to cover up one's sins, but what Christ told the people of his day: They can interpret the weather, but not their own times (Luke 12:54-56). In the same way believers in Christ can today live with unseeing eyes of what is happening outside the church in the world of contemporary secular culture and academia. Or they fight the wrong enemies in the name of all that is holy (cf. Olthuis, Hart, Seerveld, Zylstra & Olthuis, 1970:50 ff.)
- A following implication is that, instead of the church being a servant of the proclamation of the Kingdom message, it is turned into an "establishment". It looks at itself as an indispensable sacred institution, as an end in itself rather than as a means towards erecting a sign of God's kingdom. It has to exist and maintain itself for its own sake.
- Travelling along this cul-de-sac the next result is that the prophetic voice of the church for the world "outside" is silenced. Its sermons and all other activities become saltless. It can no longer witness to the *total* rule of God, that *all* of life belongs to Him. According to Colossians 1 verse 15-20 Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn *over all* creation. *All* things (visible and invisible) were created by and for him and holds together in him; he reconciled to himself *all* things on earth and in heaven so that in *everything* he may have the supremacy.
- Therefore Christ is not only the Head of the church, but the King over the entire creation. A true church has to teach this *full* Gospel and the *whole* will of God (cf. Acts 20:25-27).
- Since the church itself is viewed as belonging to a higher order (regarded as something closer to God and thus semi-divine), any critique directed at it is ignored, suppressed or immediately rejected as negative. No one should rock the boat or disrupt the peace and unity – even at the cost of the Truth.
- The final outcome of it all is that genuine prophetic preaching – intended both for the church members and the world outside – dies. It is replaced by all kinds of moral, devotional, doctrinal or pietistic (introspective) sermons. Often only to assure Christians that they may feel good about themselves and be certain about their heavenly destination.

I cannot stress it enough that what we need is not mere *formal* changes, like eloquent sermons in contemporary language or even more sincere preaching, but *relevant prophetic* preaching – the *content* has to change. That will open our eyes for what is going on in and outside the church and battle with the dark powers of our age – also in higher education.

The prophetic Word was confirmed to us. You'll do well to keep focussing on it. It's the one light you have in a dark time as you wait for daybreak and the rising of the Morning Star in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19, cf. also Rev. 22:16).

What I am saying may sound a bit too radical to some Christians. However, I am only trying to fulfil my Protestant duty. If, during the sixteenth century, there were no critical protest against the established church, we may today still have been trapped in the Middle Ages.

### 8.3 The real solution

Long ago Kuyper (1931, fourth lecture) already provided the same diagnosis:

A dualistic conception ... has, on account of its intense contemplation of celestial things, neglected to give due attention to the whole of God's creation. It has, on account of its exclusive love of things eternal, been backward in the fulfilment of its temporal duties. It has neglected the care of the body because it cared too exclusively for the soul.

Different sorts of dualistic worldviews were and are developed. But because of the inherent tension in all dualistic worldviews, none of them will provide us with a sound biblically informed worldview.

Any reformulation or re-arranging *within* a basic two-realm framework has proven to be a fruitless exercise. In spite of all the alterations and modifications the fundamental view remains the same. The two-engined motor, regardless of whether it is tuned, overhauled or rebuilt, continues to drive and shape everything we think and do (cf. Olthuis *et al.*, 1970:122).

The only way out of the present malaise, powerlessness and irrelevance of many of our churches is to deliberately and completely reject this unbiblical view, which from about the second century AD compromised the true Gospel of God's kingdom and already has held it in captivity for 2000 years.

### 8.4 A free university

I have advocated that Christian higher education cannot be *isolated* but should never be *dominated* by the political ideologies of government or economic interests. Now I am as strongly pleading for its freedom from ecclesiastical bondage. If in their office as believers Christians do not take

the initiative to establish a Christian school/college/university, as a matter of urgency, churches may do so. But they should always keep in mind that such an institution should as soon as possible be granted its independence.

The idea of a politically and ecclesiastically free college/university is not only correct in principle, but the history of the PU for CHE I have related to you also proved – albeit in a negative way – that it is the best practical option.

I am not underestimating the role of the church. It is the power-station in God's kingdom, empowering us with his liberating Word. But the energy of faith generated there should not stay there – what a useless power plant it will then be. The power of God's message should energise every church member to fulfil his/her specific calling outside the church walls during the rest of the week.

## 9. Conclusion: the tragedy, possible responses, future research

Like the psalmist of old you may now say "Selah!" My nearly endless series of four articles have come to an end. I warned you beforehand that it would be a sad story, resulting – at least for some of us – in a broken heart, desperation, frustration, disillusionment, depression and even anger.

### 9.1 An immense tragedy

But of much more importance than one's own personal emotions is the tragic fact that – in spite of all its shortcomings and defects – we will never again see the old PU for CHE under the African sun. Within a little more than a decade Christians themselves have transformed it according to Western internationalised secular ideologies beyond recognition. By uncritically *accommodating* to "world standards" they have disposed and destroyed the faithful work – accompanied by many personal, financial and other sacrifices – of many generations of Christians since 1869. Because of disobedience to God's most fundamental commandments the lamp providing light (Psalm 36:10) was removed from the NWU (cf. Rev. 2:5).

Today we could have had a totally different NWU if the option was considered of neither negatively *abandoning* this world – an impossibility – nor of following the easier way of simple *accommodation* to unbiblical ideologies driving contemporary culture, but of positively *transforming it from within*. As indicated previously, such a transformation needs not be either *coercive* (towards other faith-commitments) or *indoctrinatory* (in the case of Christians).

## 9.2 Three possible responses to this article

I realise that I have overfed the readers by touching on too many issues. In spite of my long-windedness I have skipped important questions like how to properly use God's fundamental, pre-scientific revelation in creation, in the Scriptures and in Christ in our scholarly endeavours (cf. Van der Walt, 2008: 13 ff. and 2010c: 22 ff.) But let our attitude as African Christian academics be the same as that of Samuel of old: "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:10). My own final conclusion is the same as that of the wise writer of Ecclesiastes (12:13): "Here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man/woman."

What kind of responses can be expected to what was offered in these articles?

### 9.2.1 Disappointment

Even if not expressed, you may think: Bennie, you have wasted not only your own time coming to Grand Rapids, but also that of most of the participants at this IAPCHE conference (and now the readers of the *Journal for Christian Scholarship*). You have kept us busy with *what* internationalisation implies and *how not* to internationalise Christian higher education. What we really needed was *how* to be positively internationally involved.

It will be no excuse from my side to reply that the task of philosophers is not to provide answers to all the questions, but rather to question all the taken for granted answers. What I should confess is that I cannot provide you with the *how*-answers. There is neither a "quick fix" for Christian higher education, nor for how to internationalise it. Christian scholarship is a worthwhile idea with liberating perspectives, great rewards and joys, but simultaneously full of hardships, troubles and challenges – especially in this century of globalisation.

### 9.2.2 Disagreement

I am fully aware that not everyone at the NWU, or at this conference, or the readers of the four articles in this journal will agree with my viewpoints and what I have said. My personal stance will be controversial. Some may regard it as utterly extreme, entirely unrealistic, totally out-dated, and very conservative or basically obscurantist. Others may view it as too radical, even the paranoias of a freak: Is Christianity really incompatible with capitalism, pragmatism, scientism etc.?

### 9.2.3 Agreement

I have at least received one positive response prior to the IAPCHE conference in Grand Rapids which in a way also summarises the main thrust of my paper. In an e-mail of 16 January 2013, prof. John Vander Stelt, for many years involved in the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (IAPCHE), writes:

I can be brief: the general thrust is excellent – gripping, eminently practical and even prophetic, a succinct summary of IAPCHE's challenges since 1975, a valuable lesson for all (Reformed) Christian institutions of higher education in our shrinking, rapidly changing and burgeoning (international and inter-regional) Christian community of higher education (colleges, universities, institutes, seminaries, etc.). What happened, and is happening, at PU and the VU, can, and will be replicated, unless all of us remain alert to growing subtle forces of autonomous thinking and living.

Your African story echoes, or reflects, an European story and has penetrated the main thrust of North American higher education not merely in a non-Christian, but anti-Christian, way. As a result, Christian higher education implies that North and South, East and West, need each other in being vigilant as history continue to unfold, learn to think, plan, pray, teach, do research in the power of the Spirit, always at the feet of the One who died and rose again for us and the whole world. In this way non-Western and non-Northern countries will not flourish if they depend on the North and West for their educational future.

The kind of internationalizing you continue to press for includes learning from each other how to, and how not to, be engaged in and press for a form of higher education with in spirit, structure, curriculum, pedagogy and cultural stance indicates a willingness to be humble, not famous, repentant, not arrogant ... In your paper, you are battling with some of the most subtle forces of deception in Reformed higher education.

### 9.2.4 Humility

On the one hand, we should be extremely careful, when using the name of Christ by calling something "Christian", not to misuse the name of our Lord. Then what one establishes or maintains should really be different from what the secular, international market offers. On the other hand such humility should never relieve us from our calling to work and pray for distinctive Christian education. Because, as Hart (1976:69) puts it: "The word 'Christian' as it qualifies the word 'scholarship' is not to be taken as an adjectival accident, as a gratuitous addition to an otherwise unrelated entity."

This does not imply a kind of triumphalism. Our prophetic witness in scholarship should not be overrated. Its effect may be marginal or even absent. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, who knew beforehand that what they were going to proclaim will not be heard by the people. But they simply continued with utmost sincerity. This is also the only thing we can do – and pray that God will use us as effective instruments in his Kingdom.

### 9.3 The need for further reflection

To fully explicate the distinctiveness of Christian higher education will, however, require yet another article! If one day I get the opportunity to elaborate on the first article in this series, my main points will again be the following: structure, direction, context and leadership. The following four points may serve as summary and reminder:

- Defining the *structure* of a Christian university: its task and aims. It can, for instance, be regarded as a community (as far as possible autonomous, not determined by political, economic and even ecclesiastical factors) of senior members (the lecturers) and junior members (the students) in the joint intellectual pursuit of understanding their world in general as well as the needs of specific professions (cf. Hart, 1976; Venter, 1975, 1978a, 1978b and 1978d).
- For a Christian institution its *direction* is of the utmost importance. Its normative basis has to determine its task, means and aims (cf. Venter, 1994). At the same time its day-to-day practical application is accompanied by many challenges. For instance, does a Christian college or university really imply indoctrination? Should it admit non-Christian academic staff and students? How to apply confessional pluralism at the same institution?
- How the specific *context*, for example being situated in Africa, co-determine its task and aim. For example, what kind of service (directly or more indirectly) should a college/university render to a specific society? (Cf. Lategan, 2003).
- What kind of *leadership* does a Christian university require? We have seen what *managers* can do. We are also aware of the leadership crisis in Africa – regarded by many writers as *the* problem of our continent (cf. Ilo, 2012 and Van der Walt, 2006:123 ff for the different leadership models in post-dependent Africa). We don't need one-eyed myopic managers, but leaders with integrity, commitment, passion and vision. We need leaders with burning hearts, with transformed minds, ears

hearing the cries of our continent, eyes which can see deep and wide, powerful hands to work hard, and willing feet to walk the dirt roads of Africa.

## 10. A vision and passion required

A year prior to his death as chairman of the Centre for Biblical Transformation, one of my beloved Nigerian friends (who untimely passed away in 2010, cf. Van der Walt, 2011b:919-956) wrote a book *Africa's enigma and leadership solutions*. On the title page of the copy he mailed to me (July 14, 2009) Tokunboh Adeyemo (2009) wrote a few words, thanking me for my small contribution to Christian education in Africa, wishing me well for the future and concluding with the following words: "Keep your vision and passion for Africa's renaissance alive!" To be able to do so Christ's advice should be kept in mind: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves [= dangerous secular ideologies]. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16).

Adeyemo's last words are also my parting words to IAPCHE in general and the leaders of existing and to be established Christian institutions on our continent in particular: Keep alive your vision and passion for a unique kind of African Christian education! Stated in Latin, the lingua franca of the first universities on the European continent: *vivat, crescat, floreat academia christiana!* – may the Christian academy be alive, growing and flourishing!

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Note: Due to the fact that not much has been published elsewhere on the history of the Potchefstroom University told in this article, this bibliography is firstly, though not exclusively, mainly confined to the publications of local (Potchefstroom) authors. (My apologies for including so many of my own publications, but after all this is my own story.) Secondly, without excluding secular works on higher education and ideologies, I have deliberately tried to draw the attention of the reader also to sound Reformational sources. Thirdly, I have milked many cows, but the cheese I have made remains my own responsibility!

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## God se opdrag aan Abraham om sy kind te offer eties bekyk

*H.G. (Henk) Stoker*

*Fakulteit Teologie*

*Noordwes-Universiteit*

*Potchefstroomkampus*

*henk.stoker@nwu.ac.za*

### Abstract

#### ***God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his child ethically viewed***

*Sacrifices of children were in ancient times in use among some nations around the Mediterranean Sea. While the “gods” of the nations had apparently no ethical problem with the sacrifice of children, the God of Israel prohibited it many times in the Bible. The child sacrifices of the Canaanites were also one of the terrible sins that God gave as reason why Israel had to destroy them. Yet He command in Genesis 22 the patriarch of Israel, Abraham, to sacrifice his child. The article argues that God as holy and righteous, through this specific command rejects the unethical and horrible pagan custom of child sacrifices. That it was not God's intention for Abraham to perform the task is clear from the end of Genesis 22 – a conclusion that had a lasting influence on the descendants of Abraham and Isaac.*