

THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS BASIS

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- Introduction -

Hendrik van Riessen was born in 1911 in the town of Bloemendaal, in the Netherlands Province of North Holland. Through the influence of his home and family, and in the tradition of Abraham Kuyper, he adopted the biblical perspective that religion is integral to all of life. He studied electro-technical engineering at the Technical University of Delft and started a career with the Bell Telephone Company. During the Second World War he was actively involved in the resistance movement. He managed to complete his doctoral dissertation in 1949, writing on the important topic of *Philosophy and Technology* at the Free University of Amsterdam. The seminal philosophical work of Professors Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven, at the same university, had shown him how to apply and work out the valuable insights of Dr Kuyper in the field of technology. From 1951-1974 Professor van Riessen was the first lecturer on behalf of the *Stichting voor Bijzondere Leerstoelen in the Calvinistische Wijsbegeerte* (a Foundation for Special Endowed Chairs of Calvinistic Philosophy at state universities) at the Technical University of Delft, and concurrently during 1961-1964 he fulfilled the same function at the Technical University of Eindhoven. In addition, he also lectured in Philosophy at the Royal Military Academy at Breda. In 1964 he was appointed as 'ordinary' lecturer in General Systematic Philosophy and Cultural Philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam. In his valedictory lecture in Delft (1974) he spoke about Christian philosophy as intrinsically connecting thought and belief. Authentically Christian philosophical deliberations are conditioned by the certainty that the Scriptures are the Word of God.

Professor van Riessen developed as a cultural philosopher with an impressive analysis of the structure of modern technology, to a more general philosophical thinker. Many people are indebted to him for his wide vision, and desire to be of service to people other than just philosophers. The ACHEA Press would like to thank Professor van Riessen for his permission to publish *The University and its Basis* in this revised edition. We believe it to be an important contribution to the Christian literature on the university, and to the ongoing debate on the basis, place and task

of universities in the next century. He currently lives in quiet retirement.

The publishers.

Chapter One:

The University.

1.1. *Science, philosophy and the university.*

I am honoured to address the conference.¹ Deeper than this honour, however, I feel the heavy responsibility of taking part in the effort to erect a Christian university on this continent.

Those who look at this project with secular eyes will observe only a very small task force that can hardly be expected to succeed. And if it should nevertheless succeed, the visible results could safely be ignored.

But when you look at this project with spiritual eyes — and that is the only way to see things truly — you will observe something having the features of the mustard seed; you will see the Kingdom of the Lord that has come and is still coming. When the Lord grants this project success, your spiritual eyes will witness a major achievement of our civilisation, a piece of

¹ *The University and its Basis* was first delivered as three lectures to the Unionville Study Conference of the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies on 28, 29 and 30 August, 1962, and published the following year in the *Christian Perspectives Series*, by the then Association for Reformed Scientific Studies, in conjunction with the Guardian Publishing Company, Hamilton, Ontario. This present edition has been revised and edited by Dr. Keith C. Sewell with the permission of the author. The publishers also acknowledge the kind assistance of Professor Dr. A.P. Bos (*Vrije Universiteit*), Dr. Geoffrey Bongers, Rev. J.W. Deenick, Mrs. Alida L. Sewell, and Dr. Bruce C. Wearne (Monash University) in the preparation of this edition. The footnotes to this edition have been added by The ACHEA Press for the guidance and information of readers, and were not part of the original lectures.

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true culture and true civilisation, because and in so far as it is controlled by the Christ of the scriptures and by the Word of Christ.

But before you become proud, look again, look at its history, and at the history of Christian civilisation with its endless chain of human failures. Then you will learn that it is man himself who fails. His failures are caused by the inclination of the human heart to hypostatise the results of his successful actions, thereby to secularise them so that they lose their true meaning and start to decline.

However, before history disheartens you, look yet again and observe that this history is fundamentally the victorious execution in Jesus Christ of the project of God in which it is appropriate that everyone be used as an obedient instrument.

My task is clear. It is to discuss these questions: What is the meaning of the university? What is the lesson of history? What is needed to found a Christian university?

1.1.1. Science.

Science cannot be, as is frequently supposed, a field of autonomous and neutral human activity. It is based on and guided by belief.

The very idea of the neutrality and independence of science has a religious origin. Although many scientists are not aware of this fact and although this faith is the common world and life view and the spirit of our times rather than the simple belief of each individual scientist, it nonetheless has a strong influence on the whole of science and its course.

It is up to the Christian scientist to clarify this relation between science and faith. Moreover, the Christian scientist should understand how this faith ought to guide him or her in science. And the Christian scientist is bound to discover whether or not he or she is unsuspectingly ruled by other concepts of life.

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1.1.2. Philosophy.

Philosophy is the scientific tie that embraces all the special sciences. It unlocks the gate to the reservoir of all the basic questions of the sciences. In general, philosophy is the territory of all the ultimate questions of humankind, where the philosopher is motivated by the search for wisdom. It will be clear that especially in this area the problem of the presuppositions of science — about the relation between scientific activity and faith — emerges.

In the present lectures we have to deal with the institution where science and philosophy are studied. Our task will be to investigate what the structure of the university ought to be and especially, how the dependence of science and philosophy on faith has to be accounted for in the structure of the university.

That investigation will confront us with the basis of the university. We are, of course, above all interested in the Christian university. I sincerely hope that my contribution will be of some use to you in your joint effort to establish such a university.

1.1.3. The Meaning of the University.

What then is a university? Is it a top level school of preparation for a profession? No, since that would only be a first rate trade school or a combination of such schools. The relation of professional study to the university will be discussed later.

Could the university then be an institution for scientific investigation and research? Not that either, although investigation and research have their rightful place at the university as we shall also see.

In my opinion the university is the place **for training in science**. We shall have to develop the correct feeling for these words: **training** and **science**. But first I must add another feature. The private study room is also such a place. The

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difference is, however, that **the university is a place of joint training**. It is a community of learning. It uses the forces of group activity but in a special sense. There are two kinds of members of this community. Some are already learned people, the others are learning students.

It is for these students that the university exists. They are the professional goal of the other members, the lecturers and professors. The student, not the professor and his research, is the human core of the university. **The scientific training of the student is the true meaning of the university.**

Now let us look into the word 'training'. John Henry Newman in his famous book, *The Idea of a University*, typifies its activity as education and not as training.² While **I prefer training to education**, it is not because I would deny an educational relation between professor and student, but **because true study demands that increasingly the guidance of the student has to make room for the student's own development into a scholar**. This independence is essential for the man or woman of science, and the university fails in its task when it does not provide the student with the opportunity to operate independently at the peak of intellect.

You will agree, I trust, that **training in science** expresses this state of affairs better than education. Although the student will have to follow the professor's guidance until training is complete, the goal is that the student will gradually grow into the mentor's partner in science.

This is also necessary when we look at the question from another angle. **Training in science is no less than being engaged at the frontier of human knowledge**. At this frontier the professor is learning as well and in that sense has to view the student as a companion. That is why in the field of teaching at the university, and only there, the process of teaching can never be separated from original research. **This research is**, as I stated above, not the goal of the university,

² John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated* [1852]. (London: Longmans, Green, 1929), 125-178.

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but **an indispensable means to provide that training in science which is the true aim of the university.**

In addition to the training of the student at the university, therefore, the advancement of knowledge through investigation and research on the part of the professor in collaboration with such more advanced students must be accorded a place. We must understand this relation between training and investigation thoroughly because it is a very important feature of the university and is easily misconstrued.

José Ortega Y Gasset, as could be expected, has written a remarkable book about the university.³ He is so very much afraid that instruction will lose its true aim, that he proposes to eliminate investigation and science proper from the university. The university, he maintains, must not search for knowledge. This proposal cannot be correct.

The highest level of training of the mind involves training taking place at the dynamic frontline of knowledge. It **must**, therefore, **include investigation.**

There can, however, be another faulty relation at the university between training in science and investigation. It is this false trend against which Ortega takes a stand, because it threatens the very existence of the university in our time. I have in mind the trend that the investigation become an independent and perhaps the most important goal of the university. Where this happens the student soon becomes the forgotten person at the university which will then become a research centre.

Of course investigation at the university must also be true investigation, it must maintain its 'distinctive integrity'⁴ and live up to its own calling. But it is bound by a limiting

³ José Ortega Y Gasset, *The Mission of the University*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1946).

⁴ In the original August 1963 lectures Professor H. van Riessen used the term "sphere sovereignty."

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condition comparable to the conditions of the research department in an industrial concern. **It has to serve the training of the student.** The method of investigation has to be adjusted to this service and the field of investigation has to be chosen accordingly.

What, therefore, does the training of the student really mean? It has, of course, something to do with the accumulation of a certain coherent body of knowledge, which the student must assimilate as his or her own knowledge. But we know that at the university level the state of knowledge is continuously changing. **The student is trained for the habit of life-long learning.** The university aims at the cultivation of the student's mind. In addition to a content of knowledge, this cultivation means both the instrumentation and motivation of the mind. The student has to learn how to attack a problem, how to investigate, analyse, think, reason, judge, withhold judgment, and so forth.

Moreover, **training in science** requires that the student becomes aware of problems, develops a real and hearty interest in them, and engages in them fully for their own sake. Thus the cultivation of the student's mind means a belief in the meaning of the search for knowledge and a motivation by this belief. To which problems should the student's mind attend? **My first answer** is: To all that are important for human life. And I have to stress this and repeat it because it is largely forgotten in the world of the university that the student has to confront all the important problems of reality. A university student needs a universal interest.

Only when we are thoroughly aware of the significance of this first answer may we observe that there is also a **second answer**: the student has to become well versed in a particular field of problems. We may put it this way: the student has to philosophise as well as specialise. The need for specialisation itself will occupy us in due time. At this moment I only draw your attention to this very important statement: **that in order to philosophise thoroughly it is necessary to specialise, and in order to specialise efficiently it is necessary to philosophise.**

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In developing my idea of the university as the place where students are trained in science, we should also consider the meaning of science. On the territory of science we meet the special sciences from mathematics to theology, as well as philosophy. Does training in science therefore mean that the student has to become learned in all these sciences? Centuries ago such an aim was realisable and was in fact attained by many a learned man. But for well over a century that has been out of the question, and every passing decade the scientific world moves itself yet farther from such an all-around expertise.

More important than the reflection that it is impossible for a learned person to be an expert in every area, is the understanding that such an exhaustive learning is unnecessary. It is already superfluous because the student later on will enter a certain profession for which only a special science is needed. But we shall say no more of this argument at this stage, because we have not yet discussed the relation of the university to the professions.

The purpose of training in science is not to master all knowledge in all the sciences, but it **is training in science as such**, in its method, in its approach to the major problems of our world, to one or another of them and the whole of them. Its aim, moreover, is to obtain the habit and the motivation of the scholar. It is the awakening of an interest in our civilisation and its problems. It is a training in the competence which will enable the trained scientist to take a leading part in our civilisation and to make a special scientific contribution to it.

Here again we meet with the two sides of the university: the universal and the special side of training in science. You will understand that for the universal side of training, by which I mean the over-all, all-around, general scientific view, **philosophy is the subject in which the student ought to be trained**. Philosophy, the all-embracing science, provides the background for the special sciences and is the field of the foundational problems. It provides us with the general scientific approach to reality.

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Newman considers philosophy to be the core of university education. Knowledge at the university is for him essentially philosophical and the philosophical habit of mind is the goal of the student's training.⁵

You may perhaps object that this is the typical self-serving approach of the philosopher, but then you will have missed the point. Although I grant that universal/general/philosophical study may not be the only centre of gravity at the university, and that specialist study has importance of its own as a second focus, I agree with Newman that a **general training is the first goal of the university** and that it concerns itself with **teaching the student to philosophise**.

However, let me now advance **two arguments** for **specialised training**. Some special training will be necessary in order that the student, in getting a general education, may thoroughly learn the scientific method, the relation of a special science to reality, and also how the questions that surface in philosophy come to expression in the special sciences. Only in that way will the student be able to grasp their meaning.

The **second argument** for specialised training is this: the distinctive role of the universally trained person of science involves a contribution somewhere on the front-line of our civilisation. Training must aim to enable the scientific scholar to act expertly in this vocation. The professions are important at this point. The student is prepared for a profession by studying the special sciences which are related to that profession and by practising that profession and applying insight.

But the proper goal of the university must be the cultivation of the mind in order that the universally/generally/ philosophically trained person acquire the habits of the scholar.

⁵ J.H. Newman, *op. cit.*, 102-123.

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According to Newman, the university produces the ‘gentleman’ and according to Ortega it produces the ‘cultured man’. Although I am somewhat suspicious of the content of their ideal as a kind of hypostatisation of the scholar — which we encounter already in the humanist of the middle ages — I agree with them that the university falls short of its goal when it does not share in the formation of the universally cultured person.

More to the point: those who are wise know the truth and practise it. Remembering the role of philosophy in university education, you will agree that it is better to say that the university ought not **only** to train students for a profession, but in the first place to develop them into wise men and women equipped with habits of learning and the methods of science. That should be the result of **training in science**. But at the beginning of a new university it is possible, however difficult it may be, to take this conception into consideration. As for me, I think this is the right course to follow. The modern university is far removed from this ideal. I know this only too well. You will hardly recognise anything of the picture I have drawn in the typical modern university.

There is yet another argument. Thus far I have only made reference to the proper analysis of the **structure** of the university, the **place** where the student is trained in science to enable the highest cultivation of his or her mind. This other argument concerns the needs of society. The modern university in most of its faculties assumes that it is best meeting the needs of society when it produces highly specialised scientists and scholars. It cannot be denied that such are urgently needed. But there is reason to doubt whether the university is the institution that ought to train them. **One could make a case that it is the task of technical and professional training colleges to educate specialists.**

It would also be possible that graduates from the university become specialised educators in these professional colleges, so that society generally would furnish this specialised training — rather than the university as such. A specialised training is

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also necessary for the training of the universally cultured person. But a conflict does not have to arise between this requirement and the generalising approach of university training.

But as much as society needs specialists, there is also an urgent need for broadly cultured people on the level of science. Indeed, our civilisation is in urgent need of wise men and women of culture precisely because the present university does not train them. **More than anything else in the crisis of our time we need wisdom based on learning.** This quality is needed for an all-encompassing and well-balanced approach to the massive complexity of modern problems.

The contemporary university produces specialists; while in society broader leadership falls to those who are educated by experience, whether or not they are university graduates. The conclusion is that the contemporary university does not train and provide the men and women it could and ought to provide.

At this point I must briefly elucidate the concepts of **wisdom, culture and science**, because they **are often** used in a sense different from the one I have in mind. Generally, these concepts are **given a secular meaning that is the fundamental opposite of the religious character these concepts truly have.**

Taken in their true sense, they are qualities of man's religious being, of our absolute dependence upon God. Only when we in faith give them this meaning, can true wisdom develop; only when Christ occupies our heart, only then can true culture, that is our growth in the image of God, develop. And only then can true scientific knowledge, that is the understanding of the command of the Lord over reality, arise.

When, on the contrary, these concepts are understood in a secular sense, while they do remain in fact religious qualities, they are considered to be qualities of man's autonomy. As a result of this error wisdom turns into foolishness, the image of God into the image of fallen humanity, who longed to be equal

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to God, and science becomes the tool of humankind's desire to achieve independence.

However, although the 'religious' and the so-called 'secular' standpoints are fundamentally opposed, they nevertheless occupy a common ground. They are both religious. They express true religion or idolatrous distortions of true religion. **Even the latter does not exist outside and beyond all that is being restored in Christ. That is why the Christian is on speaking terms with the world.** That is why the Christian is never allowed to deny the traces of wisdom, culture and knowledge in so-called 'secular' life.

The antithesis between the religious and the supposedly secular view has an important bearing upon the community of the university. If science were entirely free, as is frequently supposed, the antithesis would, of course, not arise. But then neither a community nor study would be possible at the university. However, such 'absolute freedom' is impossible, because that would simply entail an endless, pointless, searching, scientific activity — an empty accumulation of information.

Not only is science always bound by the states of affairs which are investigated, but science is — at least unconsciously — bound by the continuity of knowledge already gained and by the direction of the search as inspired by the current trend. What is often in fact meant by 'the freedom of science' is its presumed autonomy, and that too has a religious basis.

Returning to the above mentioned antithesis, we may state that the university always displays the features of a community. And it cannot be both a religious and a secular community at the same time. Actually, the situation can become more complicated. It is possible that the university as a whole is not an active community. It may be only an organisation and the community consists merely of a common feeling behind that organisation. General training for the student in the university then becomes impossible. It may then be the case that only the faculty forms an active community. When that community also ceases to exist, it will

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be necessary, if the university is to function at all, for a community of learning be formed by the individual professor together with his or her students.

Of course, the professor or lecturer does not make the student wise, cultured and learned. These virtues can only be developed by means of a community, within which senior academics assume leading roles. Clearly, such a development should proceed in a deliberately chosen direction. Otherwise academics become useless. You will appreciate that this 'remnant' of a university, whatever its direction, is not my idea of a university. My point is that study at the university can only be performed in a community, however small it may be.

Students, at least during undergraduate years, will have to trust and to follow the professor whose spiritual direction will have an impact upon them. That direction is decisive in the training of the student. **It is because of the secular direction of the liberal universities that so many Christian students in attendance there gradually fall away from the Christian faith.**

In my opinion, the university in its entirety ought to be a purposeful community, and its direction should be that true religious response of the university to God which its own distinctive calling requires.

I have given a rather lengthy analysis of the university. In order that you may keep in touch with the essentials, let me sum up. Keep in mind that at this point we are only interested in what the university **ought** to be.

- 1. The university is the place for training in science.**
- 2. This training should be performed in a learning community.**
- 3. The object of university training is the student who is the reason for the existence of the university.**

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4. Investigation and research should be introduced to support and serve this training.

5. The inner purpose of the training of the student's mind is the building of a wise man or woman of culture who masters the tools of science.

6. For this purpose the approach to science ought to be both universal and special.

7. The external purpose should be the training for general leadership in society combined with training for a profession.

8. Study at the university is directional. The direction is mainly determined by the university, a faculty or the individual professor.

It is such a community of universal and specialised learning that so strongly attracts young people; those who are eager to be challenged in their thinking, who like to dwell on the highest levels of thought and invention, and who have developed an interest in the important problems of reality. They presume that there, and nowhere else, will they be able to tackle these problems methodically, and expect precise and clear results.

1.2. *The Modern University.*

Once inside the university, the experience of young men and women is often one of disappointment. Some complain that the university is too conservative, impractical and inefficient.

Students who like to study meet quite another disappointment. Instead of a community of learning they find an organisation of more or less isolated scholars. From the beginning they lose sight of the unity and the whole of science, and enter upon a road of specialisation with never a chance for a universal approach.

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On that road the experience of most students in most faculties is that they become victims of 'cramming' for a profession with no opportunity or time for independent learning. In the end they have often forgotten the important problems that interested them at the start. Worst of all, they gradually come to believe that their specialised approach and particular problems are the only really important ones.

It is necessary to emphasise this deterioration of the university. We have become so accustomed to it that we have begun to consider it as normal. However, when it is compared with the forms of the university in previous centuries, it appears quite abnormal.

What the modern university has lost is:

- 1. The community of learning, which has been replaced by an organisation.**
- 2. The general approach of science, which has been replaced by specialisation.**
- 3. The liberal character of study has been replaced by the system of cramming useful knowledge and/or information into the mind of the student.**

I am saying nothing new. And up to a certain point I also agree with the general view that the present state of the university is caused by the development of society and of science.⁶ Before considering that point, let us try to understand what the development of science and society has meant for the university. I have mentioned the trend of specialisation, which is caused by the growth of science and the extension of knowledge. If unchecked, it will eventually become a threat to the community and the universality of the university.

⁶ Prof. van Riessen first came to the attention of many English language readers with his *The Society of the Future* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952).

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It must, however, be clear that this trend of specialisation cannot satisfactorily be explained by the growth of science from within the university. More important is the fact that during the last two centuries science has become a growing force in society due to its application, especially in the field of technology. In our time it has become the decisive power in society. For science to maintain its predominant position, it had to fulfil at the university the expectations of society concerning the ever broadening needs that it itself had stimulated. Science had therefore to become increasingly specialised.

It is important to note that the university today has a - tremendous intellectual influence on society, more than ever before. That influence is greater than that of any other institution. It has far outdistanced the influence of the church. But this influence could only be gained, and can only be maintained, by the sacrifice of the independence of the university. Losing its 'distinctive integrity' — and thereby its own character — it has deteriorated into an institution whose law is mainly prescribed by society and eventually by the government. **This is why pragmatism, the philosophy that made truth dependent on practical use, has obtained such an influence at the university and in the sciences.**

Besides this specialisation and the compelling influence of society upon the university, there is a third cause for this change. The rise of living standards in the last century opened the gates of the university to more and more levels of society. And still more people from all strata of society entered it when it became known that this was the road to greater influence, affluence and comfort. The university has become a mass institution. Its task is considered to be the mass production of the crop of executives and specialists needed by society.

Such modern characteristics: specialisation, a pragmatic relation to society and mass education, are generally accepted as the causes of the radical changes within the contemporary university. It means that the community of the university is lost, that the general area of science has been neglected, and that freedom in study is considered as a loss of precious time.

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Once the university has undergone this change, it is no longer the place to train cultured men and women. Even if it is accepted that the change is a real loss to, and in fact a deterioration of, the university, the prevailing opinion is that it is no use to lament, because the change is inevitable. Of course one has to correct the worst effects, but in general it will be necessary to follow the trend prescribed by the development of society.⁷

I said above that I agreed only to a certain point with the current description of the state of the university and the causes of its change. This is the point that I had in mind then. The description thus far is nothing more than a reflection of a purely materialistic world-view.

Moreover, you must know that this concept of reality is the result of a certain 'merely' scientific approach to it. For such an approach the spiritual issue, the aspect of faith, is neglected because it does not appear among the facts of science. What does appear there is a faith that can be shown to be dependent on something else, something 'purely' factual, such as the condition and needs of society. And that of course is not a genuine faith. The result of all this is a deterministic concept of reality, and a more or less fatalistic view of the present university.

If this were true, not only would my exposition of the genuine university have been in vain, but the idea of a Christian university would also be a fiction. However, this concept is the

⁷ It is indeed striking that these words pre-figure almost exactly the sentiments expressed by some of Australia's leading university administrators in 1995 and 1996. For example, Professor Mal Logan, Vice-Chancellor of Monash University, Victoria, stated when meeting with eighty Victorian secondary school principals in November 1995 that: "Unless we defend and extend our high-quality education system, Australia's future is uncertain at best. The pace of change may be faster than we would like but there is nothing any of us can do to insulate the education system from the impact of micro-economic reform." *Etcetera* 43 (14 November, 1995).

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result of a prejudice, of an over-estimation of science. Its strength is that the strictly scientific approach — and that is the one students most often encounter — does not reject true faith, but does not detect it either. For science with the character of an ostrich, faith does not exist.

As Christians we know that the decisive aspect in human life is faith. At present we are passing through a crisis of faith. It is in fact a crisis of humanism which has consumed all its idols of faith. This crisis gives rise to a loss of meaning and norms in the faith of more and more people. Some of the effects are that the interest in universal problems is lost and that the ties of the community are loosened. A kind of spiritual disintegration has set in.⁸

I would add three theses to the reflection of the present university and the causes for its change:

1. The decline of the university is due not only to the development of society but also to the development of the spiritual denominator of our civilisation.

2. The change of society itself — although one has to consider the interdependence — is chiefly dependent on the spiritual make-up of our time, which is in general the source of motivation for society.

3. The influence of faith on the university does not come exclusively from outside. The university itself has always practised a kind of leadership in the formation of the spirit of the time. This is especially true in the twentieth century.

Let us look at this last thesis. It means that the decline of the university, and of genuine opportunities for the study of universality, is caused not only by its relation to society, but

⁸ It should be noted that these lectures were given prior to the full emergence of 'postmodern' theory, and the so-called 'postmodern condition'.

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much more by the spiritual make-up of our civilisation as it is still partly formed by the university itself.

In this respect the present university is the precise opposite of the Christian university we hope to establish.

The antithesis centres in the question of the basis of the university. To shape and develop a Christian university requires knowledge of the present state of the existing universities and the failings thereof. Before discussing this topic it will be necessary to investigate further the interdependence of the university and society, and the spiritual facet of civilisation, by now turning to the history of the university.

Chapter Two:

A Short History of the University.

2.1. *The Origin of the University.*

Now we discuss two points: the **idea** of the university and the **relation** of the university to its environment.

Within western civilisation the first university was that of Salerno, erected in the eleventh century and containing only a medical faculty. More important were the three universities founded in the twelfth century at Bologna, Paris and Oxford. Among the universities founded in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were those at Salamanca, Cambridge, Montpellier, Prague, Vienna and Heidelberg. Of course older universities existed even before our era, in the east. We are, however, at present interested only in their development within western civilisation.

The first thousand years of the Christian era witnessed ongoing political instability and oppression of various kinds. In the field of knowledge scholars were mainly occupied with the preservation, compilation and interpretation of the ancient knowledge that had come down from the Greeks and the church fathers. It was the merit of the monasteries that they preserved the treasures of antiquity for the succeeding centuries. They did not make original contributions to science. For various reasons this situation changed in the eleventh century. We should not forget that one reason for this change was Islam; Islamic scholars and teachers reintroduced the classical authors and also opened up some important new fields of knowledge.

At that time a revived spirit of curiosity, the beginning of all science, brought students together around one or more

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famous scholars and thus the university started.¹ Some students went to university to learn a practical art or profession such as law or medicine. But study was not limited to an art or profession. The real aim and interest of the university, and for its many students, was the **encyclopedic learning** it offered the cultured man of that time. The student was educated as a Christian humanist in the truths of morality and religion. It must be noted, however, that the way of living of the students of that time was less Christian than that of many agnostic students of our age. Fighting, drinking, raping, stealing and murdering were daily crimes. In general the students practised the study of the so-called liberal arts: the *trivium* of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and the *quadrivium* of geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music.

From the beginning they were true universities and remained such up to our century, with one restriction, namely, that at first study was rather tradition-bound, a mere learning of established knowledge. It was only later that the name university got its significance as an institute of universal study. In the beginning that was covered by the term *studium generale*. The term 'university' then signified the association of professors with their students.

It is important to note that a key feature of the early university was **the free association of scholars and students**. In some places the professors were in charge; in others the students themselves controlled everything except the examinations.

Church and state had no authority at the university. In most instances it was a kind of guild. It was not even initiated by the church or the state or any other outside agency, but was

¹ Since the first publication of this paper there has appeared, under the editorship of Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, Professor of Medieval History, The Free University of Amsterdam, the first volume of *A History of the University in Europe*, entitled *The University in the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). In the present context see especially the introductory section by Walter Rüegg, 'Themes', at 30-34.

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the result of private initiative. The university was in fact an example of what we might call 'limited secularisation'. Limited, because this 'secularisation' only concerned its relationship with the church, the dominant spiritual power of that time. The 'fundamental secularisation' which we speak of in relation to later developments is of a religious kind and therefore is not limited to inter-relationships within society. At this earlier stage the university, along with the state, was only seeking to achieve a limited secularisation over against the power of the church.

The university therefore made a good start. It was a community of universal learning within an association that was independent according to the character of scientific learning itself. As such it was the institutional establishment of the 'sphere sovereignty'² of science.

2.2. *University, Church and State.*

The complete separation of the university from church and state, however, could not last long. The university gradually grew and as a result needed aid and support from outside. The support was sought from the pope and the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and later, in some cases, the ruler of a country. The first need of the university was to be recognised as such. For that purpose it requested a charter from the emperor or the local ruler.

But it also needed some privileges such as freedom from taxes. More important, however, was the fact that the university obtained the *ius docendi* (the right to teach), the *ius promovendi* (the right to confer a doctor's degree), and the

² Elsewhere in this edition the editors have used the term 'distinctive integrity'. 'Sphere sovereignty', as a central ordering principle, is bound to have a place in any scripturally ordered view of the university. However, it must be noted that in some reformed organisational settings the dynamic ordering significance of 'sphere sovereignty' has been lost sight of, with the term coming to function as little more than an inherited doctrinal *shibboleth*.

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effectus civilis (admission to office). The latter was a right of the civil authorities and did not interfere with the sphere sovereignty of the university. The other two privileges, the right to teach and the right to confer a doctor's degree depended not only upon the required level of learning of the professors, but also upon the orthodoxy of the instruction provided. In many respects this is an important question for our subject. The pope, of course, granted these rights. But since it was a time of struggle for power between the emperor and the pope, and also between the emperor and other monarchs, the latter tried to enhance their influence. They effected it through their right to grant the *effectus civilis*.

The general historical trend, as you undoubtedly know, has been that pope and clergy had acquired influence over the university in the middle ages while the state took over after the time of the reformation. This too showed the trend toward the separation of the university from the church. Whether and to what extent it was also a religious secularisation we will consider later.

First we have to ask the question whether the bestowing of these rights was really the prerogative of the church or the state. Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), the founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, understood clearly that from this point the universities' historical development became malformed. Neither the pope nor the emperor had the right to decide the affairs of the university concerning learning and science. The university itself, executing the right defined by its own character and task, had to decide such matters.

You will understand that it was the distinctive integrity of the university which was under threat from this outside interference, with regard to both teaching and investigation. The consequences of this interference were condemnations by the church of the scientific results of men such as Galileo, and a general frustration of the development of science for a long

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time.³ We also meet them in the struggle of Kuyper for a free university against the state controlled universities of the nineteenth-century.⁴

We can understand very well that, because weak universities would prefer the church as a strong companion, they did not bother much about the price they had to pay. At that time the church would expect that its supervision of the universities was required in order to prevent heresy. On the other hand, the state, after finally establishing its independence from the church, would not only defend the university against the church but also tried to bring the university over to its side in the struggle and thereby secure a new partnership by maintaining a similar control over the university that the church formerly practised. Nevertheless it was a mistake, because it brought the university and its teaching and investigation into an unnatural dependence which handicapped its development.

2.3. Nature / Supernature.

In order that we may understand clearly where and why the wrong moves were made, we should approach the problem from another angle. Alongside of the church and the state, the universities in the middle ages developed into a third power. They originated from an interest in reality, a curiosity about unknown things and a search for knowledge through learning and investigation. The universities offered to the student a

³ For a more recent discussion see Richard S. Westfall, *Essays on the Trial of Galileo*, (Rome: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1989). [*Studi Galileiani* nr. 5].

⁴ In the context, see Frank Vanden Burg, *Abraham Kuyper: A Biography*, (St. Catherines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978), 91-114, 209-219; McKendree R. Langley, *The Practice of Political Spirituality: Episodes from the Public Career of Abraham Kuyper, 1879-1918*, (St. Catherines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1984), 103-113, and Louis Praamsma, *Let Christ be King: Reflections on the Life and Times of Abraham Kuyper*, (St. Catherines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1985), 75-80, and 107-122.

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road to truth apart from the church. Thus far it was a righteous activity. This striving for independence from the church, this 'secularisation' from the church, was indeed a correct move.

But just as the schools of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were in fact competitors of the popular mythology, so too the universities gradually became competitors of the Christian religion. We must not allow all our attention to be distracted from this fact by the secularisation of the university from the church. Masked by this **limited** and **legitimate** secularisation, a **religious** secularisation set in within the university. In the wake of the severance of the ties with the church, the ties with the Christian religion were, albeit initially unintentionally, also weakened.

Humanism as we know it now, did not yet exist, although the origins of modern humanism can be traced back to the humanism of that time. The earlier humanistic movement was generally among those faithful to the church and moreover was more interested in studying and reading classical literature than were those associated with the new universities.⁵

There is another reason why the religious secularisation of the university gradually and unnoticeably arose as a result of its separation from the church. The church identified itself with religion and faith, and thought that it had to cover and control the field of religion entirely. In this context, when the university declared itself for the independence of science from the church, it would sooner or later adopt a view in which the field of science and learning, and the university itself, were assumed to be void of religion and faith.

This question is very important for our subject. We must investigate it further. In the background of the church's view on worldly affairs and its policy, stood the then generally

⁵ See Paul O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961).

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accepted theme of **nature** and **supernature** (grace). There are two rather unstable and conflicting characteristics of this theme: (1) the **autonomy** of nature and (2) the **synthesis** of the two parts.

The separation of the world into two realms — a field of grace and faith where the church was considered the authority, and an **autonomous** field of nature — explains why the church identified itself with faith and religion.

The doctrine of the autonomy of **nature**⁶ signified that it was being controlled by natural law, was essentially on its own, and independent of the realm of **supernature** (or grace). The same was the case with human reason which could autonomously, it was thought, merely by its own light, discover the laws of nature. Faith and religion therefore had **nothing** to do with reason. In other words, nature and human reason that belongs to it, on this standpoint, are essentially not disturbed by the fall and therefore, in the last analysis, do not need the redemption by Jesus Christ.

To that field of **nature** belonged *inter alia* the state, the university and science. This helps to explain why the church restricted faith and religion to its own territory and why the separation of the university from the Church also led to a religious secularisation.

From the very start the university took this defective course. **It used its rightfully won distinctive integrity for the establishment of its supposed religious autonomy and did so with the consent of the church.**

The basis of that university was, negatively, the independence from faith and, positively, the autonomy of human reason. For that matter, this is still the case today. We shall see later that

⁶ Here 'nature' does not signify the aspects of the order of creation investigated by, say, physics or biology. What is referred to here is a view of creation (envisaged as 'nature') as *non*-dependent upon the Creator, a view which is pagan in its origin.

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this is the crux of the crisis of the modern university as well as the essential point of difference between it and the idea of a free Christian university.

But why then did the church try to control the university? For the answer we must turn to the other characteristic of the theme: the **synthesis** between nature and supernature. The autonomy of the two sides is balanced by their synthesis and in that relation nature ranks lower, as a kind of first step.

The synthesis was designed by Thomas Aquinas as a definite compromise between faith and reason. The church from the beginning had carried on a struggle about which one was predominant. Thomas's synthesis in fact compromised Christianity with Greek culture and philosophy. This compromise led him to rate Aristotle so highly that he would refer to him, without mentioning his name, merely as 'the philosopher'.

Now the practical significance of the idea of the synthesis was that the church, although it recognised the autonomy of reason and the university in a religious sense, nevertheless claimed for itself the right to supervise worldly affairs, and to adjudicate in intellectual matters. Being in authority in the area of supernature, it had to complete the works of nature and prevent the university from making independent and false statements concerning the affairs of the superstructure about which the church ought to have the final say. Such statements could, for example, arise in the areas of justice and morality. They were possible because the church taught that human nature was capable of good, although it was weakened and wounded.

We now have a clearer picture of the structure of the situation. The church granted both too much and too little to the university. It agreed with the religious secularisation of the university which was in accordance with the autonomy of reason, but did not wholly agree with the limited secularisation of the university from the church. In other words, the church granted a religious autonomy to reason and the university whereas it ought to have proclaimed that

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everything within the creation is **dependent** since everything is from, through, and to God in Jesus Christ (Romans 11:36). It ought to have proclaimed that everything is in fact religion.

And on the other hand, due to the idea of the synthesis, the church did not respect the distinctive integrity of the university **but put it mistakenly under its own final supervision**. But it was the very idea of the autonomy of reason that undermined the church's policy of supervision from the start.

The **first error, the idea of autonomy of nature**, was the beginning of what finally became a religiously secularised university. The **second error, the idea of synthesis**, was the beginning of the loss of the distinctive integrity of the university, and therefore the beginning of its dependence, not upon the church, but upon the state and society.

2.4. Summary of the history of the university.

Let us now for a moment look at the history of the university itself. This history displays an ever growing influence upon the course of our civilisation. In the last century it even gained a definite mental leadership over civilisation and thereby threw off the yoke of the church, which up to that time had been more or less in charge of spiritual affairs.

It is not so easy to weigh the influence of the university in a positive or negative sense and to make up a balance sheet. That is hardly ever the case. The university has certainly made a significant contribution to the cultural level of our civilisation, to the welfare of mankind, to the liberalization of life, to the maturity of Western man, and to democracy. But it also contributed to many disturbances, such as the French revolution. It became an enemy of the Christian faith and fought it with apparent success, thereby putting the church constantly on the defensive.

At present the university is the main producer of atheism and nihilism, and is, at the same time, their victim. The significance of the idea of the autonomy of science will be discussed later.

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The influence of the university, as the main producer of atheism and nihilism, came from the instrumental **power** of its **knowledge** and from the **personal power** of its **cultured men and women**. We should look closer at the distinction between the **instrumental power of universal knowledge** and the **personal power of cultivated people, leaders and formers of our culture**. In one respect we have already considered this, in the way that men of learning exercised an influence over the relation between university and church, between limited secularisation and religious secularisation. But we now need to consider the distinction in relation to the well-known division of the university into the modern natural sciences and the humanities. Nevertheless, there is clearly a close affinity between the two distinctions.

In practice, these represent two centres of gravity which the university has followed in different times throughout its history. The teaching and study of the humanities has kept a steady course from the beginning through the centuries, but diminished in influence in the twentieth-century. The natural sciences, however, received a strong impulse from the introduction of the experimental and mathematical methods. From the seventeenth century onwards modern natural science became a factor of importance at the university and gradually overtook the humanities in influence. In the nineteenth century it surpassed them as a result of the tremendous success of the application of the knowledge of natural science.

While the situation at present is somewhat confused, it can be said that specialisation grew within the sphere of the natural sciences, and consequently 'the cultured man' has nearly become obsolete at the university. Moreover, many of the humanities have been taken over already by the methods of natural science.

2.5. The Cultured Man of Humanism.

Perhaps you will infer from my argument that I am seeking the rehabilitation of the humanities with its training of the

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‘cultured man’, of the learned gentleman. That would be a serious mistake. Let us have a second look at this ‘cultured man’ of the ancient university in order to understand better what we ourselves are looking for and what we are obliged to avoid.

Of course we appreciate many qualities of the traditional ‘cultured man’. He is learned, has a thought-out cultural conviction, and has trained himself to be moderate, well balanced, tolerant, impartial, reasonable, prudent, kind, orderly, loath to quarrel or to give offence. We all like these qualities and are eager to acquire them. On the other hand, you will perhaps observe that such a true gentleman will be somewhat weak and seems to lack a standpoint. But if you think **that**, you don’t understand him. Nevertheless, we hear that he has a thorough contempt for any kind of dogmatism. He is **liberal**. At this point the Christian begins to suspect him.⁷

We doubt his qualities still more when we learn that he is motivated by **self respect** and by his belief in the **dignity of man**. That, at least, is a dogma he does not condemn and apparently did not even recognise as a faith. At any rate, we know now what his strength and his fundamental standpoint are. His is the standpoint of the **superior man** who is free in mixing with his equals, and has only contempt for what is below his level. That explains his tolerance and impartiality. But beware lest you touch his self respect, for then he will lose all his noble qualities and become intolerant and agitated.

We shall understand him better when we bear in mind that he does not look for his ideal in the Holy Scripture but in the scriptures of the pagan classics. His mentors are the Greek

⁷ Cf. the essay by Karl Löwith, ‘Can There Be a Christian Gentleman?’, in *Nature, History and Existentialism and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*, (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1966), 204-213. See also A.M. Toplady’s critique of the “fine gentleman” in his ‘Christianity Reversed; a Summary of Lord Chesterfield’s Creed’, in *The Works of Augustus Montague Toplady* (London: Ebenezer Palmer, 1828), Volume IV, 428-429.

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philosopher, and the restrained and cynical Roman stoic. Socrates and Cicero are his most emulated models. What the cultured man likes about ancient civilisation is the superiority of its learned, civilised and liberal élite. It is to such an élite that he himself wants to belong. And reading the classics, he thinks, will perform the miracle. The member of the élite is supposed to be learned. He thinks this is the road to true knowledge and wisdom. He is civilised. He is a gentle, moderate, reasonable and orderly member of the community. He also believes that he is liberal, above dogmatism, truly critical and free in all his moves. He tolerates every opinion.

But 'liberal' has a relative meaning. It signifies the freedom of the educated, compared with the bondage of other people who have to work for their living. The same holds for the origin of the name **scholar**. It is derived from leisure time, the opposite of labor, which is the fate of the masses.

It is probable that the haughty, fastidious and reserved attitude of the cultured man was not yet present, at least not yet dominant, in the university of the twelfth century. At that time it was not even a feature of humanism which existed then somewhat apart from the university. The humanist who opposed scholasticism merely tried to imitate and to revive the language of classic literature and to influence his contemporaries by his teaching.

What we must see more clearly, however, is that the seeds of the cult of the élite of learned men were present at that time. And the church had sowed them. The idea of a synthesis between Christianity and pagan philosophy (based on the autonomy of reason, already cherished by Boëthius in the sixth century, and given definitive shape by Thomas Aquinas) was predominant at the time of the start of the university as well as of humanism. On this score there was no difference of opinion among church, university and humanism. We might even say that in all three of them the leadership was in the hands of the clergy.

This synthesis meant that the Christian, in addition to his Christianity and its concern for eternal life, had to adapt him-

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self for this life to the purely human and the purely natural values of the classical authors. That was exactly the view which humanism had in mind, and the church proclaimed for the domain of nature, and the university came to accept as its concept of the 'cultured man'. Culture was not the domain of Christianity but belonged to nature and was the work of humanism. And the classics provided man with the ideal of the true *humanitas*, genuine humanity.

We shall not understand the situation correctly unless we observe that, at a time of such decadence in the church, the synthesis of Christian belief with the writings of ancient pagans, really sought to restore the church by means of the revival of the classics. This was still true in the fifteenth century in the case of the humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam. But it was a synthesis all the same. The cultured man of that time was a Christian humanist. Inside the church, he was a Christian who knew humility and the corruption of the heart, who knew of redemption in and through Jesus Christ. Outside the church, he was a humanist who forgot about that knowledge and believed rather in human dignity and autonomy.

The attempt to have both the wisdom of the cross and the wisdom of the ancient world could not last for long. When humanism joined forces with the renaissance it changed from a pedagogical into a religious movement. The humanistic world-view took over the university: it was then that religious secularisation began to develop at the university. The ideal of the university, although hidden, yet present from the start, then became clear. It was to train a cultured humanist, a member of the learned élite, shaped by the classics, believing in his independence and dignity, both of which were based on the autonomy of his reason.

The doctrine of human autonomy is incompatible with a harmonious wholeness of life. The Christian humanist is two persons in one. Here the two compete and are in fact enemies and keep from clashing only for as long as they occupy separate territories. That is, however, impossible. The idea of synthesis by definition bridges the separation, while the

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religious oneness of life inhibits in man any attempt to reconcile himself to that same separation. Which one will be victorious in the scholar? After the middle ages, as soon as man became interested in this life as much as in the next, the humanist in man gradually conquered the Christian. More and more cultured and learned men turned their back on the church and became mere humanists.

Moreover, the classically shaped élite men of culture — the gentlemen — could not last. In a time when everything has a progressive trend, such a backward looking class quickly becomes outdated. That is the impression we get from the fine writings of the historian J. Huizinga.⁸ His longing for the cultured man is vain. And vain too is the attempt of Ortega to remodel the university in order that it will again produce the élite aristocrats of the mind.

What we must clearly understand, however, is that the disappearance of the gentleman was not caused by the development of society, but by the idea of human autonomy itself, because the demise is covered by the law of decay that holds for every attempt to establish religious independence and belief in self-redemption. This is especially so when the attempt is legitimised by a theory. And do we lose something of value with the disappearance of the gentleman? Yes, indeed, although the concept of his autonomy is thoroughly wrong. When he disappears we lose something of the difference between barbarism and civilisation. The university, as Ortega said, is really an uplifting principle.

To know more about this difference, no one can better inform you than the Roman Catholic Newman who a hundred years ago wrote about the university. The goal of the university, he says, is not useful knowledge, but knowledge of the gentleman. According to Newman: "It is well to be a

⁸ Cf. Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study in the Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, [1919, English translation, 1924]. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969).

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gentleman, it is well to have a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life; — these are the connatural qualities of a large knowledge; they are the objects of the university”.⁹ But he also clearly exposes what I tried to explain about the influence of the concept of nature and supernature on the idea of the university and of the cultured man. Prior to what I just quoted he wrote: “Liberal education makes not a Christian, not the Catholic but the gentleman”.¹⁰

Newman was thoroughly convinced of the exclusive importance of the Greek and Roman civilisation for the shaping of the gentleman. He said that classical civilisation is so intimately associated with Christianity, that it may even be called the soil out of which Christianity grew. That civilisation only can provide man with the real and proper cultivation of the mind. According to this view, Christianity was never intended to replace classical civilisation. But Newman saw not only the sunny side of this educated gentleman. That is the difference between his view and that of Huizinga and Ortega. He knew very well that many of these gentlemen became secularised from religion and enemies of the church. However, he was so completely caught up with the idea of the autonomy of nature and reason that he never doubted his concept of the gentleman and merely intended to correct him with the added knowledge from the sacred superstructure. The separation of secular knowledge from the eternal was self-evident to him.

2.5. The reformation of the university.

You might like to hear how the protestant reformers, with their return to the bible and its radical message, responded to the fateful course taken by the university. They certainly tried to change it. Many reformed universities were erected and existing ones reformed: Leipzig, Heidelberg, Königsberg, Jena, Basel, Geneva, and Leiden among them. But when we investigate these universities further we learn (and it is a

⁹ J.H. Newman, *op. cit.*, 120-121.

¹⁰ J.H. Newman, *ibid*, 120.

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pertinent lesson for our age too) how extremely difficult it is to be separate from the spirit of the time.

The return to the Holy Scriptures required at the university not only a new theology but also, and especially, a new philosophy. It required the rejection of the idea of a neutral and autonomous science and a new approach to the classics. It seems that the Reformation nowhere succeeded with even the beginning of the performance of this task. The history of the Reformed universities in short was as follows: **They started an alliance with humanism in opposing scholasticism. When it became clear what humanism really aimed at, that alliance was broken and the reformed leadership fought humanism with the aid of Aristotle.**

Soon afterwards the time to reform the university thoroughly was past, because by then humanism was safely in charge. It took a 'giant' like Kuyper — he was called a 'Bos Atlas' by an adversary — to erect a genuine reformed university.¹¹

But let us return for the moment to the first protestant universities. Luther for one distrusted humanism but was not much interested in universities. In his opinion of secular life, the influence of Aristotle on his education was still strong. Melancthon, on the contrary, figured strongly in the renewal of universities, but he merely tried to humanise them.¹²

The aim of the newly erected reformed university of Strassburg, where Calvin taught for a time, was to establish a narrow link between the humanistic ideal and biblical devotion. I am not well enough informed about the university of Geneva. It was erected by Calvin and flourished under Beza. At least Calvin understood that not only theology but the

¹¹ 'Bos Atlas' is an allusion to a highly authoritative Dutch work of reference.

¹² Cf. Franz Hildebrandt, *Melancthon: Alien or Ally?* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1946), and Andrew L. Drummond, *German Protestantism since Luther*, (London: Epworth Press, 1951), 11-35.

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whole field of science ought to be reformed. But nevertheless there too, theology was the main interest, the faculty of letters was humanised, and a Christian philosophy, which Calvin thought necessary, apparently was not developed.¹³

All the universities of the Netherlands of that time were founded as Calvinistic universities: Leiden, Utrecht, Groningen, Franeker and Harderwijk. But the statutes of the universities of Leiden, Utrecht and Groningen ruled that the philosophers not deviate from Aristotle. Inventors of new theories were not tolerated. Descartes, a Roman Catholic, whose philosophy spawned radical humanism, strongly influenced the history of Leiden and Utrecht. Voetius opposed Descartes in the name of Calvinism and the reformation, but with the aid of Aristotle.

2.6. The University of Leiden.

What happened to the reformed universities and where they went wrong can perhaps best be understood from the example of Leiden. The university (*hogeschool*) was founded in 1574 by the States of Holland at the request of Prince William I (1553-84), who in this way wanted to reward the inhabitants of Leiden for the brave defence of their city against the Spaniards. But the background was different.

The reformed church for some time already had pleaded with the prince and the states to provide for the education of its ministers. "There are many sheep but the shepherds are missing," the newly reformed churches said. Their request is understandable. The church was merely interested in theologians. But the prince, writing to the states, asked them to set up a university "not only for the benefit of religion but also for the benefit of the civil government."¹⁴

¹³ For Calvin and philosophy, see Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

¹⁴ This was a momentous step. Geoffrey Parker notes that "The Dutch decision to create their own university reflects a new attitude towards their constitutional position. They had long recognised that

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This is what happened. In the shortest possible time the states founded and opened a university. It got a charter in the name of the enemy, the king of Spain. Four faculties were set up: theology, medicine, law and the old basic faculty of the liberal arts, which was later split up into the Faculties of Natural Science and Letters. The most important fact, however, was that the goal was a truly reformed university. The inauguration took place in the church where the Lord was asked to bless the university and cause it to grow to the honour of His name, to the upbuilding of the church and to the salvation, erudition and skill of man in all the honest and worthy arts, and to the welfare of the fatherland and the city of Leiden.

We may observe the difference between intention and reality, however, when we note that in the festive allegorical procession on that day as much honour was given to the evangelists as to the classical authors. Proofs of the seriousness of the intention were the priority given to theology and the oath requiring every student to declare that he would not adhere to any doctrine not taught at the university. Perhaps you are impressed by that fine start. If so, you will be all the more astonished to learn how quickly this Christian university succumbed to the influence of a liberal spirit and gradually became humanistic.¹⁵

they were independent *de facto*; now they began to consider whether they should not become independent *de jure* as well". *The Dutch Revolt* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 145.

¹⁵ "On the morning of the 8th of February 1574 a solemn procession wound through the streets of Leiden, to mark the dedication of the newly established university. Part of the tableau consisted of symbolic female figures, representing the four faculties; *Sancta Scriptura, Justitia, Medicina and Minerva*. The last three figures were on horseback, but *Scriptura*, who led the way, was seated in the triumphal chariot drawn by four horses. In her hand she held an open bible. Next to her car of victory walked the four evangelists". H.J. de Jonge, 'The Study of the New Testament', in *Leiden University in the Seventeenth Century: An Exchange of Learning*, edited by Th. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer and G.H.M.

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The current concept of science, founded by the Greek philosophers and based on the autonomy of reason, of course made it easy for humanism to frustrate a Calvinistic attempt in this field. But that does not wholly explain the failure. It seems to me that three original mistakes explain this failure:

- 1. The reformed people did not yet understand the necessity of a reformation of science.**
- 2. The university was intended to be both reformed and national, although only ten percent of the Dutch people belonged to the reformed church.**
- 3. The authorities concerned did not respect the rightful sovereignty of the university in its own sphere.¹⁶**

It is useful to clarify those three mistakes briefly. The mouthpiece of the reformed people was the church and the church was interested only in ministers. It supposed that when all the professors belonged to the reformed church, then everything was all right with the university. It did not even suspect the very large doses of Aristotelian philosophy the theological students had to consume. On the contrary, it urged the students on. It was a very important circumstance in the history of this university that, **although everyone concerned considered the faculty of theology to be the most important, it was the only one that did not succeed.** Professors could hardly be found and very few students attended.

Posthumus Meyjes, (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 65. An engraved depiction of the procession is reproduced as plate 15 between pages 602 and 603 in Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁶ In other words, what has otherwise been termed its 'distinctive integrity'.

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The erection of a *collegium* for the theological students improved this situation but then they became a source of all kinds of unrest. Revolts of students, even bloody rebellions, were frequent. The *collegium* especially became the battlefield of the remonstrants and the contra-remonstrants. Twice the church was victorious in the struggle to maintain the reformed character of the university. The first time was at the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-19) where the remonstrants were condemned. The church then gained effective control over every appointment of professors. But it was possible only with the aid of the state, and did not last long. With the aid of the same state the trustees soon took over. The second victory was the rejection of the doctrine of Descartes. However, it was not a victory for the reformed principle but for Aristotle.¹⁷

The error of the idea of a reformed and national university was most serious. It should be clear that due to this error the university became involved from the beginning in a struggle

¹⁷ This tendency was present at Geneva from an early stage. Theodore Beza insisted that the philosophical standpoint of the Academy be that of Aristotelianism. For example, Beza was emphatic, in a letter to Petrus Ramus dated 1 December, 1570, concerning the “determination” of the Academy “to follow the position of Aristotle, without deviating a line, be it in logic or in the rest of our studies”. The letter is printed in the *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, Volume XI, (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1983), 295. An English translation of the relevant passage is to be found in Carl Bangs, *Arminius* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 61. It is of note that under the leadership of Alexander Melville, who was strongly influenced by Ramus, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland condemned Aristotle in 1583. Cf. Duncan Shaw, *The General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland 1560-1600*, (Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 1964), 191-195. For a recent discussion of reformed scholasticism and overview of the literature, see Richard A. Muller, ‘Calvin and the “Calvinists”: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy’, *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (November, 1995), 345-375, and 31 (April, 1996), 125-160. For a recent discussion of the problems in Geneva, see Karin Maag, *Seminary or University? The Genevan Academy and Reformed Higher Education, 1560-1620*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995).

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between a reformed and a more or less liberal course. Generally speaking, the church and the students often stood together on one side while the trustees, most of the professors and the state stood on the other. It was an impossible situation. Already at the beginning the oath had to be abolished for the students other than the theological students, because it seriously diminished the student body. In view of this impossible arrangement for a national university, we can appreciate the anger of a mayor of Leiden concerning a revolt of students against unorthodoxy when he said that the council would fight the inquisition of Geneva as it had fought that of Spain. It will be clear that in the end the liberals were the winners not only because the trend of science was toward liberalism, but also because the state in fact controlled the university and compromised more and more with the liberals.¹⁸

The third error made was that the church tried to retain enough influence in order to maintain the reformed character of the university, whereas the state effectively controlled it and the trustees were eager to retain the support of the state in order to suppress the influence of the church. The church and the state in fact handicapped the development of the distinctive integrity of the university. The effects of this mistake were that the university could not grow freely and naturally, for it had to absorb and digest all the problems and quarrels of both church and state.

What we miss in this story is the influence of the reformed people. The reformation had proclaimed the responsibility of

¹⁸ In English the word 'liberal' only acquired its specifically philosophico-political meaning in the early nineteenth century. At that time it denoted sympathy for the *liberales*, and opposition to the *serviles*, in contemporary Spanish politics. George Canning (when British Foreign Secretary) used the term of himself in the House of Commons on 14 April, 1823. The approximate British equivalents of the 'liberalism' referred to here by Prof. van Riessen would be seventeenth and eighteenth century English *latitudinarianism* and Scottish *moderatism*. These latter may be seen as precursors to nineteenth century liberalism, particularly in its theological expression.

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everyone to God in every territory of life. **A reformed university was not the responsibility of the church nor of the state but of the reformed people.** But perhaps you will suggest that the application of the 'sphere sovereignty' principle would have been premature, expecting too much of the people of the sixteenth century.

Professor Rutgers mentioned in 1886 at a meeting of the Free University that he had discovered an important document from the sixteenth century. It was a design of a **free** reformed university consisting of five faculties. The professors would **not** be nominated by the state but by a university board. The university would not be national but an international association of reformed churches. All parents would be asked to present their first born son for the service of the church and science. The university would not be paid by the state but by the parents and especially by reformed people who had no children. This design shows at least some insight into the requirements of the sovereignty of the university over its own affairs. Whether such a project would have succeeded at that time no one can tell. It would at any rate have been a tremendous task to prevent the decline of the reformed church as well as the victorious advance of humanism at the universities. But this much we can safely say: it would have avoided the above mentioned errors that from the start caused the defeat of the reformed cause at the University of Leiden.

2.7. The Free University of Amsterdam.

In concluding our historical review, we must look at the founding of the Free University at Amsterdam. It was erected in 1880 by Abraham Kuyper and his companions. I don't think that you will find any one man in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries of the stature of Kuyper: scientific, erudite, inventive, constructive, practical, forceful, industrious, dynamic, and with such a feeling for the common people. No Kant, Marx, Lincoln, Churchill or Barth could stand in the shadow of this giant in heart, mind and deed. Yet he might have been forgotten already, if he had he not desired in all his life to bow absolutely before the Word of God. That is the way

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in which the Lord used him for the remarkable revival of the reformed people in the Netherlands in every area of life.

What was his aim for the Free University? It was the reformation of science and the university so that they would be entirely ruled by the Word of God. For him it did not concern theology alone, "For Christianity to be a leaven in the life of our people," he said in 1870, "then the judge, the physician, the statesman, the man of letters and the philosopher too must have the content of his science illuminated by the light of Christ". And warning all Christians who were content with the kind of synthesis we dealt with above, he asked them why they again wanted to join the foolishness of the cross with the wisdom of the world which undermines the former and is condemned by it.

We cannot understand why the Free University was planned and designed unless we look into the university situation of that time and examine its structure and spirit. As we have seen, the European university started as a free association. Then it received a charter from the pope and/or the emperor, as well as other privileges to establish its freedom. In the course of time it came more and more under the control of the civil authorities. The French revolution then took away the remaining freedom of the university and transformed it into an organ of the state. It became in fact a state monopoly. Not only its finances, but also its structure and the nominations of professors were entirely controlled by the government. The sphere sovereignty of the university was then seriously handicapped. Science and the university came to rest in one powerful hand: the government.

It was felt by many that this development meant a deterioration for the university, and various free universities were founded in the nineteenth century. The constitution of the Netherlands also made provision for such a university. The difficulty was not constitutional, but one of unequal access to funds and resources.

Let us now consider the spirit of the time. Science and the university were then under the control of humanism, and the

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latter had already revealed itself in the Enlightenment as the enemy of the Christian faith. And more important still, humanism from then on tried to prove its superiority with its formula of the historical evolution of mankind. Humanity was thought to have existed first in the childish state of dependence marked by **faith** in an invented God. It then passed through a state of adolescence and invented a world of **metaphysics** and **speculation**. But now humanity has become **mature** and thereby **free** and **independent**. It trusts entirely in established facts and in the autonomous instrument of **science** by which reality can be controlled.

The belief in evolution not only explained and set aside religion as fiction but also gave humanism a strong motivation for the idea of progression through science. For that purpose science must be absolutely free from every external tie or dogma. It was in that spirit that Heynsius on the occasion of the commemoration of the three hundredth anniversary of the University of Leiden spoke of its principle as that of freedom, ignoring the fact that Leiden started as a reformed university in the spirit of Christian freedom.

It may seem that the absolute freedom of science is incongruous with the control of the state over the university but that is no more than appearance. The political form of humanism then was liberalism. It held to the ideal of absolute freedom for the individual in society. For the state it meant that it was not allowed to choose any side, that is, it had to be neutral. That attitude, according to liberalism, was the only possible way the state could give everyone equal justice and be truly general.

This neutral attitude was exactly what the university needed. The idea of the autonomy of science, looked at from the outside, was in fact neutrality, the impartial disregard of all religious issues. The control of the university by a state that, for the purpose of being all things to all men, took a neutral standpoint, meant, in fact, the promotion of the idea of an autonomous and therefore neutral science and university. Of course all this was actually very one-sided and far from neutral. The basis of political liberalism was the religion of the

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independence, or absolute freedom, of man. The autonomy of man's reason and the supremacy of scientific truth, were the bases for the supposed neutrality of science and the university.

It seems to be nearly impossible for the defenders of neutrality, even for those who are Christians defending the neutrality of a certain field, to understand that they in fact are defending humanism and opposing the scriptural principle of the absolute sovereignty of Christ. In fact, they ignore the truth that the standpoint of the withdrawal of all religion from politics is neither neutral nor general, but merely another religion and a false one at that. Moreover, they fail to see that the withdrawal of all religion at the university does not make science generally valid but merely produces a science that belongs to the religion of humanism. Another so-called impartial result of 'neutrality' was the law of 1876 that transformed the Faculty of Theology into a Faculty of the Science of Religion, thereby breaking the tie that bound it with the Christian religion.

The practice of neutrality in the Netherlands meant that men like Willem Bilderdijk, Isaac da Costa and G. Groen van Prinsterer were not appointed as professors.¹⁹ Their philosophy of science followed reformed principles, and was therefore considered to lack neutrality and impartiality. The judgment of history is that their learning has as yet not been forgotten while the work of nearly all of the neutral professors who were nominated has already been forgotten. Such then were the state and the university that opposed the concept of a free reformed university. It was opened in 1880 with the famous oration of Kuyper on sphere sovereignty. That principle, he said, was the stamp of the new university.

¹⁹ For the life, thought and work of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, and information on the others mentioned here, see Harry Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan Station, Ontario: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989), in this context particularly 21-37, 52-111, and 159-170.

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Neither the state nor the church had the right to control the university. It had to be a free association of the people. Only in that form could it develop according to its own laws. Such a university would not claim neutrality, and would not give the appearance of generality, as if it were suitable for everyone, but it would clearly display its basis and direction. While the aim of the Free University was science, its character was reformed.

The effect of the principle of 'sphere sovereignty' showed itself during the *Doleantie*. This rupture of the church had a disadvantageous influence on the university, but, generally speaking, the school's development was not as disturbed by that conflict as the church conflict in 1618 disturbed the University of Leiden. Then the church interfered directly in the ultimately unworkable situation of a combined reformed and general university. It was very well understood that the right to found a university was not enough to make it prosper so long as there remained inequality between it and the state universities concerning the conditions for the university's existence.

The proposal to place the Free University of Amsterdam on an equal footing with the other universities was the subject of a law proposed and defended in 1905 by Kuyper, who was Prime Minister at that time. Its main topic was not the financial inequality but the *effectus civilis*. The debate in parliament was conducted mainly between Kuyper and the professors of the state universities and was most interesting and revealing.²⁰

The adherents of the neutral university considered the introduction of dogmatic universities a disaster for the country. Such a university would bind the study from start to

²⁰ For the relevant speeches by Abraham Kuyper, see the *Parlementaire Redevoeringen*, (Amsterdam: Van Holkema & Warendorf [undated]), Volume III, specifically: 'Vrijmaking van het Hooger Onderwijs', 1-83, and 'Effectus Civilis', 159-167, and Volume IV, specifically: 'Vrijmaking van het Hooger Onderwijs', 132-147, and 'De Effectus Civilis', 169-184.

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finish, they said. Not the search for knowledge but the possession of established knowledge would be its aim. Science and the university ought to be free. The lack of freedom, they thought, was irreconcilable with science. One of the most important opponents, however, held that science could not be irreligious and admitted that every science is based on faith. Nevertheless, he defended the neutrality of the university and opposed the Free University, because he thought that an institution lacked the right to bind the individual professor. Admitting that science is not neutral, he defended the neutrality of the university, but at the same time was obliged to abandon the community of the university and the universality of science as expressed in each discipline.

The law of 1905 granted an association the freedom to appoint professors at a state university at its own expense. This 'emergency solution'²¹ was intended as a corrective to the supposed neutrality of science and scholarship, and ignored the requirement that a university be a community of learning. Besides opposing the tie between dogma and science, some objected to the principle of the initiative and control by people who knew little about science. Builders and bakers, it was said, could not very well govern a university, and in the long run they would destroy it or at least destroy the freedom of investigation.

It was not so difficult to refute all these objections and Kuyper, helped by many members of parliament, did it masterfully and wisely. The law already guaranteed **freedom** of education. He only asked for **equity and justice** concerning the conditions.

It was wrong that science was only in one hand, the hand of the state. The education of the state universities was also directional. It undermined the church and drew the children of the people away from their religion. They therefore had asked to have their own free reformed university. The high scientific

²¹ At the time of giving these lectures in 1962 Professor van Riessen was employed as a professor under this emergency ruling.

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level of teaching and learning was not any more secure at the state universities than at the Free University.

Chapter Three:

The Basis of the University.

3.1. *The University's Problems Focused.*

In the first chapter, I described the meaning of the university by calling it the place for **training in science**. In the second chapter I gave a survey of its historical development under the influence of its external relationship to the church and the state, and to the specific concept of science and philosophy within the academic sphere.

I explained that the basis of the university constitutes the central issue. Our present task is to investigate this. Let me first explain why. The foundations of a house are part of the house and laid to suit the structure of the building. But the foundations do not depend on the house. On the contrary, the house can only exist in dependence upon its foundations. The foundations provide the house with its structural security.

The same is true of the basis of a university. It belongs to the university and is shaped according to the typical structure of the university and can even be made an object of scientific investigation. But the basis does not depend on the university and its activities. Rather, the university depends upon its basis, it cannot even exist without a basis. The basis is the prerequisite for its existence. But this basis of the university is connected with the wider society and also to its internal operations. The basis gives expression to the university's faith. As such the basis cannot be removed, altered or even criticised by members of the university community acting simply in an academic way. The overturning of the university's basis is only possible on a level where the exercise of faith confronts faith. In such a transformation a new faith will have to replace an old faith.

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My intention in this lecture is to consider the basis for a Christian university and the problems of such a university generally and in the present situation. But first I ought to explain more fully why the university, including the so-called liberal university, depends upon its basis.

Let me summarise what has been said already. The purpose of the university is the student and his or her training. The university aims via science to cultivate wise and cultured people who are also leaders in their profession.

The university does not operate out of thin air. The student enters the university after it has already covered a long distance, and even as it is moving in a certain direction. It has a great store of knowledge and is busy at the frontier to gather even more. Although this knowledge, for all times and persons, concerns the same creation, that knowledge cannot be derived from the creation directly. The acquisition of knowledge comes from the human confrontation with the creation as an act of choice and judgment concerning the laws that order that creation. Even the received store of knowledge cannot be taken at face value. Ever and again it should be considered critically. Knowledge does not arise from facts; rather it is a result of the human contemplation of facts. This human element is very complex, but it amounts to more than invention and the trial and error of hypothesis testing.

The scientist and the university follow a certain trend. We can identify this direction as we observe their work moving down a particular path. It is a set of principles that provides them with a starting point, a direction, and a motivation. This is true whether they are aware of their belief in these principles or not. The activities of the university are in fact loaded with principles. They concern the character and meaning of every special science, of science as a whole, of teaching and learning, of the professions, of culture and of wisdom. It is of course very difficult to find within the human contribution the demarcation line for these principles and again it is very difficult to find within this field of principles the demarcation line for the limited set of those which form the basis of the

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university and to which, whether they are written down or not, every member is bound.

These tremendous difficulties, however, should not close our eyes to the existence of this state of affairs. They are presupposed by the university. To recognise this, and to investigate it, is the proper scientific attitude. To ignore this is in fact unacademic. We must face the fact that without these principles, and especially without a basis, the community of the university is lost. In such circumstances the universality of science in teaching and learning at the university ceases to be operative in forming the cultured person.

It is this basis too that alone can guarantee the 'distinctive integrity' of the university, the authority over its own affairs without interference from the state, the church or other relationships in society. The university, **not** the state or industry, ought to make the decisions about the how, the what, the where and the when of the study. Only a clearly understood community of the university practised on its own basis is in a position, officially or semi-officially, to prevent outside agents from influencing the course of the university.

3.2. The Liberal University and its Basis.

It seems, however, that the university will gain such freedom (i.e., from outside agents) only by way of a loss of freedom inside the university. The basis of the university demands a community of faith in principle. The present objection¹ to this is that such a basis is in fact a prejudice and will make science and the university dogmatic and biased. It is said that this is in contradiction to the character of both science and the university. Science ought to be free and the university should be liberal. The champions of the idea of a liberal university

¹ Professor van Riessen was speaking in August 1962 with reference to the debate then current in the Netherlands concerning the *grondslag* (basis, foundation) of the Free University of Amsterdam. The same arguments are still presented in opposition to distinctively Christian higher education in contemporary Australia and elsewhere.

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(and they are not only in the majority, but have always been and are still considered to be the true defenders of scholarship), have always looked with contempt upon proposals to tie the university to a basis.

We have to look closely at their objection. We have to admit that science ought to be essentially free and that therefore the university too ought to have an essential freedom. Especially those who aim to build a Christian university must be aware of the fact that they will continuously dwell near a border beyond which science and the university lose their proper freedom.

Science must indeed be free from practical interest, it must be freed from all kinds of human prejudices, it must reject the predominance of the set of current opinions, it is allowed to criticise tradition, to doubt every scientific statement, to question everything, to approach everything with wonder. It may choose its subjects and methods freely. Such a freedom is not only the right of the world of science and of the university but also of every single scientist. That is why I prefer to call the university a place for training in science rather than a place for education in science. The study ought to be free. But granted this freedom, the idea of the university cannot be exhausted by it. That the university is called liberal has only a negative meaning. It does not explain why and how it exists.²

The meaning of the word 'liberal' has changed somewhat in history. Throughout the middle ages it expressed the attempt to guarantee the value of knowledge in its own right. Later, neutrality became the core of the liberal idea. It meant that science and the university were (supposedly) neutral in their relation to religion and every kind of world view. They were thought to be free from every influence of that kind. The idea

² Cf. Max Weber's famous essays *Wissenschaft als Beruf* and *Politik als Beruf* and the discussion by Wilhelm Hennis linking Max Weber's theory with Abraham Kuyper's view of the university, in Wilhelm Hennis, 'The Meaning of *Wertfreiheit*: on the Background and Motives of Max Weber's 'Postulate''. *Sociological Theory* 12 (July, 1994), 123.

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was strongest in the European university of the nineteenth century and is still very strong in the United States. At present, as the struggle of science with religion seems to be nearly over, the idea of neutrality is extended by many scientists to their particular field of science in its relation to the other sciences too, and especially to philosophy. A kind of decomposition of science has set in.³

I draw your attention to both the constant and changing features of the word 'liberal'. Constant is (and that is the core of liberalness), that it means 'being free from ...', in fact from one or other influence from outside. If, however, the liberal university pretended to be nothing more, it would be the victim of an undirected, meaningless, deliberate and powerless nihilism. It apparently has always meant something more, something positive: a principle, a faith beyond scientific doubt and criticism. What else could enable the university to be free? What else would have caused the strength of the liberal universities in their fight against the 'dogmatic' university of Kuyper? What else would have moved people to build a university, except a strong and real faith?

The alleged controversy between the liberal and the dogmatic university is false. A liberal university demonstrates its academic integrity and purity by acknowledging its own basis and prejudice, rather than by publicising its contempt for universities that adopt another basis.

There are some reasons why this basis is mostly unnoticed and thought of as non-existent. First, the character of self-evidence that is apparent in every true faith; secondly, the university has been and still is considered by nearly everyone to be liberal and without a basis. That opinion has the strength an accepted convention. And in our time especially the dispersion of science and a lack of interest in basic questions puts our question outside the university. But beyond these, the most important reason is that the recogni-

³ For one speaking in the early 1960s, Professor van Riessen was particularly prescient at this point. His 'decomposition of science' compares with the post-structural 'deconstruction' of all knowledge as advocated in contemporary postmodernism.

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tion of principles of faith, and of a basis, would annihilate the current claim and pretension of science and the university. I will return to this point in due course.

We have already seen in general that the university is guided by many principles. We should now examine which principles form the basis of the contemporary university. Already, we note, the change in the meaning of 'liberal' indicates that the liberal state university does indeed have a specific basis.

During the first period the word 'liberal' got its modulation from a religious synthesis of Christian faith and scientific knowledge; during the second period the religious antithesis between scientific knowledge and faith caused the change; in our time that tension has lost its force and there now exists a kind of confusion about the specific meaning of 'liberalness'. Nevertheless, in all these phases one positive principle remained constant: the religious autonomy of man in science and the university. That is the true basis of the liberal university. It is a faith in human status. At least within the university it functioned as a religion.

The idea of the autonomy of man in science and the university took various historical forms. They all served the sole purpose to elucidate and prove that autonomy. That was the case with the idea of the inner light of reason; of innate ideas; of Descartes' method of doubt; of Hume's sure basis of impressions; of Husserl's method of reduction; and of the historical method of Dilthey; of the principle of verification within logical positivism and its attempt to demonstrate that the field of *a priori's* is a field of tautologies. It would lead us too far afield to expose how in everyone of these cases one faith was confronted by another faith.

Man's belief in the autonomy of man, however, was not enough to start science and to give coherence and motivation to the university. By itself the false idea of the autonomy of man would have been rather harmless. The power of science and the influence of the university were caused by the alliance of the autonomy of man in science and a world view of the circle of learned men, especially of the university. That world

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view was of course also a matter of faith, but it was presented as the result of scientific investigation which could claim generally valid truth because it was based on man's autonomy in science.

The idea of generally valid truth was the link between the autonomy of man and his world view. It was the knowledge emerging on the basis of man's independence in science and concerning what could at least be known trustworthily about the world. This was the essential basis of the faith of the university and was its driving force. Only that idea can explain how the university exercised such a tremendous spiritual influence on the course of history and could surpass the influence of the Christian religion and the church, and why it pretended to produce the learned élite of truly cultured men.

It was in fact a matter of apostate faith and not of universal and ever-valid scientific truth, and with the development of science, that world view changed accordingly. Thereafter, down to our times, it has followed a more or less generally accepted pattern. It has mainly been determined by the spirit of the time, which in its turn was gradually determined by the faith that ruled the university and science.

In the middle ages it was the view of a stable, orderly and hierarchic world, ordained by God and therefore to be respected as such by man. Man could map and control this world with his reason which could rescue him from his ordinary state of subjection to sense, carrying him halfway to heaven. This natural and human contribution to redemption was especially performed by philosophy and science at the university.

The reigning view of the nineteenth century was that of a world in progress. The progress was an exclusively this-worldly affair, carried out by a completely mature man with a scientific approach. Religion was not allowed to meddle with this human business, heaven was considered a private concern.

In our time we cannot very well speak of a generally accepted world view at the university. We live in a time of spiritual

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confusion and paralysis. The signs are mostly negative. Religion has sought re-entry at the university but in the main it is more than ever before a forgotten subject. Although there is a stronger feeling today than in the past about the change and development of the world, strong faith in progress is lost. Man has lost much of his former sense of self-importance. Important now is the idea of a determined course of society to which we have to adapt ourselves by means of science or from which we ought to free ourselves by means of self affirmation.⁴

Instead of faith in progress, which has disappeared along with heaven, the ideal of the merely human community arose in our century as a last resort for a lost humanity. It is everywhere present as a driving force that tries to abolish every kind of antithesis in human life. Even in church life many embrace this last result on the road of secularisation as a guiding principle.

However, this type of modern world view is not so strong at the university. Strongest there is the vision that science must be useful, that it must equip man more and more with power, even though he walks a dangerous road. It must help man to adjust to the independent development of society. More sober and more realistic, the university still believes (and is thereby congenial with its history) that it is on the road to attain valid truth in autonomous science. It does not have the pretension to produce a general world view but only produces small pieces of knowledge. This, however, is the only and generally valid truth man can attain. The rest is regarded as nonsense.

At the background of the changing world views of the university remains this common agreement throughout its history up to our time: a religiously independent science can provide true knowledge that must be accepted by all.

The liberal and the Christian university differ not only in their basis, but also in this point, that while both claim to teach true and universally acceptable knowledge, the experts of the

⁴ The original lectures referred to existentialism as this point.

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liberal university, in distinction from the scholar at the Christian university, cannot understand why everyone is not willing to accept their knowledge as true. Here lies both the strength and the weakness of the liberal scientist. His strength, because his arrogant view is above discussion and in the course of history generally has been accepted; his weakness, because he does not understand his own basis as one of faith.

3.3. A Christian University.

We should now examine the Christian university. That subject is of special interest to us here and now, because we are the guests of the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies which is planning to establish a Christian university.⁵ We, as Christians, belong to the world of science and learning and therefore have a supreme interest in the question: how ought we, as a community of learning, to act in this field?

Even the design of such a project seems to be an act of foolish bravery. The Christian university can reckon with the enmity and contempt of the whole world of universities and at best the pity of most fellow Christians. The entire history of the university seems to prove that the liberal university is normal and the Christian university is abnormal, and when attempted, has proved to be a failure. The current trend and opinion has been and still is so strong that to establish and maintain a Christian university seems to be something like climbing the Niagara Falls in a boat.

Why then is such a thing undertaken and how can it be done? The reason is apparently the same as that which urged Augustine to write his book *De Doctrina Christiana*, a blueprint

⁵ The Association for Reformed Scientific Studies changed its name to the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship in 1968.

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for scientific education on a Christian basis.⁶ It is the same reason why John Calvin asked for a Christian philosophy, and erected a reformed university. That same reason inspired the establishment of the Universities of Leiden, Utrecht and so many other reformed universities.

The same reason impelled Kuyper and his followers to establish the Free University in the nineteenth century. It was not the longing for glory or honour which drove them on; they were not inspired by the antithesis; they did not build on the expectation of success nor yet on the idea that their performances would be of some profit. Their deed was solely an act of obedience to the LORD. They knew that: "The earth is the LORD'S and everything in it; the world and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). They understood that for the university and science the word was valid: "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). They knew they had no choice, even though to follow the Lord meant to carry a cross.

In his inaugural address about sphere sovereignty, Kuyper compressed his intentions in the now famous words: "There is not an inch in the whole territory of human life which Christ, the Sovereign over all, does not call, 'Mine'."⁷ Well then, there is surely much to be done by Christians. Why did these leading men choose this field? Because they understood that in science and the university the battle of redemption and sin was decisive for human life and for the course of history.

Let me quote Herman Bavinck:

We must set against unbelieving science the science of faith, a believing scientific system

⁶ Augustine of Hippo, 'On Christian Doctrine', translated by J.F. Shaw, in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine* edited by Marcus Dods, Volume IX (Edinburgh: Clark, 1883), 1-171.

⁷ Abraham Kuyper, *Sovereiniteit in Eigen Kring*, (Amsterdam: Kruyt, 1880), 35.

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incorporated in a university. Science occupies a chief place and deserves to be delivered from the error of the age and from being proclaimed as the Gospel. The schools of unbelief have deprived us of our sons and delivers them over to our adversaries. A Christian science alone can help us ... Evangelisation is good. Mission too, but high above them stands a free university.

The next question is: how is such a university possible? It is possible if it is built on the true, and at the same time the only definite basis for us: the Word of God, the bible. I think it of paramount importance to distinguish this basis from any expression of it by man. That distinction is better expressed in Article 2 of the constitution of the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies than in Article 2 of the constitution of the Free University, where the 'Reformed Principles' are declared the basis.⁸

It was to be feared, said F.L. Rutgers in 1899, that the restriction of the basis to the holy scriptures would open the gate for all kinds of interpretations of scripture, while the choice of 'reformed principles' would be used to solve such questions about the interpretation of scripture.

That important question should not, of course, be overlooked. Yet it was solved there upside down. The 'reformed principles' should not judge scripture, but these scriptures have to judge the 'reformed principles'. We can appreciate therefore that Herman Bavinck and P. Biesterfeld at their nomination as professors in theology said that they conceived of Article 2 in the sense that the holy scriptures had been taken as the basis according to the declaration of the reformed confession. Yet in that conception too confusion can arise. It seems to solve the question of the interpretation of the bible, in one sense even better than the wording, 'reformed principles', because it is a

⁸ Cf. the discussion offered by Louis Praamsma on 'What are the reformed principles?' in *Let Christ be King: Reflections on the Life and Times of Abraham Kuiper*, *op cit*, 81-83.

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written confession, while it is not so easy to name the 'reformed principles' themselves.

We must acknowledge that F.L. Rutgers, when he made his remark, had at his disposal a set of theses about these principles, made in 1895, and how carefully Kuyper and his partners expressed themselves. Moreover, we must not forget that although the theses were of some value, they nevertheless got no general approval and by now are almost entirely forgotten.⁹

Yet, such a statement of principles does have great value, although it cannot be taken as the true basis; it has to remain relative to the true basis. The fruit of such an approach, to be put entirely under the corrective control of the Word of God, can be found in the *Educational Creed* of the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship.

I do not know of any other attempt to express the 'reformed principles' for a university besides that of the Free University of Amsterdam and that of the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship in North America.

⁹ At a meeting in 1971, the *Association for Christian Higher Education*, which established and controls the Free University of Amsterdam, reformulated its foundational statement as follows:

"For all the work done at the Free University, specifically for its teaching and research in all fields of learning, the Association stands on the foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which, according to the revelation in Holy Scripture, calls man in all of his life to the service and glorification of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and so to the service of his fellow men.

The University adopts as its goal to direct all its work in obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the service of God and his world."

W.J. Wieringa, 'De Vrije Universiteit als bijzondere instelling', in: *Wetenschap en Rekenschap, 1880-1980: Een eeuw wetenschapsbeoefening en wetenschapsbeschouwing aan de Vrije Universiteit*, edited by M. Van Os and W.J. Wieringa. (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 37.

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The North American attempt has clearly attained a greater success. **It comprises a truly scriptural start for a university.**¹⁰

¹⁰ The *Association for Christian Higher Education in Australia (ACHEA) Incorporated* has a very similar statement in its *Constitution* entitled: *Statement of Christian Belief and Principles Concerning Science and Scholarship*. The *ACHEA Statement* reads as follows:

“Human life in its entirety is religion, *coram Deo*. Consequently, science and scholarship, along with every other facet of human activity, unfolds as the service of either the only one true God or of an idol. The scriptures, the Word of God written, in instructing us of God, ourselves, and the order of creation, are the divinely inspired and authoritative means whereby the Holy Spirit draws and attaches us to, and instructs and illuminates us in the Truth, which is Jesus Christ the Messiah. This Jesus Christ, revealed to us in the scriptures as the Word of God incarnate, is the risen Redeemer and Renewer of our life in its entirety, and therefore also of all our science and scholarship. God upholds as His central purpose for His Creation the covenantal communion of humanity with Himself in Christ in communion with the Holy Spirit. True religion arises from the knowledge of God which is made possible when the human heart is renewed through the Word of God by the Holy Spirit. In this way religion plays its decisive ordering role in our understanding of everyday life and experience as well as in the theoretically focused callings of science and scholarship. The concerted and systematic pursuit of theoretical thought in a community of scholars is a necessary part of the obedient and thankful response of God’s people to the cultural mandate. The task of the theorist is to formulate and articulate a scientific and scholarly account of the order of creation for the Glory of God and the benefit of the entire community. Moreover, because of God’s gracious preservation of His creation in the face of human disobedience, those who reject the Word of God as the ordering principle for life, science, and scholarship, may nevertheless provide significant insights into the creation order of which we are all but a part, even as the central religious antithesis in all human life remains undiminished. We therefore renounce any attempt at, and reject as fundamentally unsustainable, the synthesis of scripturally directed learning with any other standpoint. The scientific and scholarly enterprise is to be undertaken in the God-given freedom of a full and free submission to the Word of God, and not least as the latter guarantees the distinctive integrity of diverse societal structures. Accordingly, the responsible freedom of the scientist and scholar must be upheld and protected against any constraint and dominion of church, state, commerce, or any other societal structure. All science and

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It must never be forgotten that the Christian university can exist only in the sphere of redemption, as a university built on grace. It is a fruit of the cross of Jesus Christ. It is a matter of 'to be or not to be' for such a university to accept what Jesus said: "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). As Hannah confessed: only the LORD "will give strength" (1 Samuel 2:10). Here too the sign of Christian life is that in every activity the believer learns to be still and rest in the expectation that the LORD will perform His work.

The document to which I refer is in my view a masterpiece. It is said by some that a certain Christian philosophy has crept in and that it therefore is discriminatory. That has to be proved, and to my knowledge this has not been done. Of course we know what Christian philosophy is meant, namely the philosophy of the idea of law.¹¹ I would say of that

scholarship pursued in faithful obedience to the divine calling will continually seek to heed the directive authority of the Word of God, will acknowledge His Law to which the creation in all of its diversity is subject, and will freely and wholeheartedly bow before Christ's Kingship over all science and scholarship."

¹¹ The author is here referring to the philosophical work of Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) and especially Herman Dooyeweerd's (1894-1977) philosophy of the law idea (*de wijsbegeerte der wetsidee*). Both taught at the Free University of Amsterdam. Their work should not necessarily be confused with the manner in which it has been utilised by some subsequent thinkers in North America and elsewhere. Moreover, the thinking of the two men was not identical. The work of Dooyeweerd has not been well understood in the English-speaking world, partly because of its philosophical originality (breaking with many unbiblical/pagan notions at a foundational level), partly because Dooyeweerd argued his case in relation to many authors with whom almost all English-speaking Christians are unfamiliar, and partly because of the uneven quality of work by his various English language translators. One of the best introductions to Dooyeweerd's thought remains his own introductory lectures: *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960). For a clear and acute utilisation of Dooyeweerd's insights see Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame

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philosophy what the president of a Chicago university once said of his own institution: “This is not a very good university but it is the only one there is.” So too: this Christian philosophy is not a very good one but it is the only one there is, and as soon as it is proved to be untrue to its basis, the Word of God, I hope to be the first to drop it then and there. It is true that this philosophy has had **some** influence upon the educational creed. The crucial question is whether that influence anywhere has been contrary to the bible — even in terms of a one-sided emphasis. I do not know of such an instance.¹²

Press, 1991). For accounts of the early development of the two thinkers, see John H. Kok, *Vollenhoven: His Early Development* (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 1992), and Roger D. Henderson, *Illuminating Law: the Construction of Herman Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy* (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 1994). For the view of the bible and its message constituting the basis of this thinking see Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

¹² The suggestion in these paragraphs is not that Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd were the first professing Christians to engage in philosophical reflection, but rather that they saw the need to found such reflection in the Word of God, rather than upon some notion of autonomous (‘a law unto itself’) reason. In the history of Christianity many Christians appropriated notions of reason and nature and tried to use these or give them some kind of Christian expression. The type of thinking that Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd, and others in that circle, sought to develop was not based on an appropriation of neo-pagan or secular-enlightenment concepts, but aspired to an intrinsically biblical *reformation* of our thinking, and therefore of our philosophy and our understanding of the foundations of the special sciences. Rather than accommodate they sought to *reform*, and in this respect they sought to carry forward the principle of the reformation itself, even in ways that many of the reformers may not, or could not, have clearly envisaged. Of course, it is not suggested that Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd and the others were wholly consistent or successful in their endeavours. The same must be said of the reformers themselves. The emphasis is to be placed on the principial basis to which they sought to adhere. As to the ACHEA *Statement of Christian Belief and Principles Concerning Science and Scholarship*, it should be understood that this is, of

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The heart of this statement is: "That human life in its entirety is religion". With this expression the Association confesses its utter dependence upon God, the ultimate destination of their work, and opposes every attempt to be autonomous in science and the university.

We must thoughtfully understand this confession. It means, firstly, that everything is religion, that is, in every sense tied to God. This is true of the liberal university and of semi-autonomous science. That is why they can exist and be of some value. In the second place, the Association confesses a willingness to recognise and comply with the character of the creation. And that, applied to university life, is the beginning of the Christian university.

That the university, which is a part of life, is religion means that according to its unique nature, as a community for training in science, it derives its religious nature from the order that God has laid down in the creation. It is founded in the cross of Jesus Christ; it exists wholly dependent on Him and it serves the honour of God and His coming Kingdom in the typical sense of promoting and equipping us for the task of exposing and mapping the law-structure that is valid for the creation. In this context the distinctive integrity of the special sciences may be recognised as they relate to the order of creation.

J.H. Newman was in a certain sense correct when he said that scientific knowledge finds its end in itself, and is not entirely useful. But he is wrong in the presumption that this is the same as stating that science and the university are autonomous. In Jesus Christ they are religiously bound in every sense, and on that condition only do they have their end in themselves, and only thus do they exist in relative independence within the creation. The neglect of the distinction between having its end in itself within the creation,

course, a human and confessional response to the gospel, and that it does not enshrine Vollenhoven or Dooyeweerd or preclude other possible authentically Christian philosophies or developments in science and scholarship.

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and having its end in itself in a religious sense, is the reason that Newman cannot explain why from a conception of autonomous science a religion of reason emerges and seduces many scientists to turn their back upon the Christian faith.

We have to consider that, whereas science is religion, and the university too, only the confession of this state of affairs by the scientists can bring science and the university on the road of life. To oppose or ignore this confession does not mean that science is dead and utterly false, but it does mean that science and the university will travel the road of death, a road of decline where they handle the truth in a decomposing sense that thus will inevitably deteriorate in the course of time.

The confession that the university is religion means that science and education start with revealed truth and that scientific knowledge as a whole, and in its details, is in fact the theoretical expression of faith. That approach is the safeguard for the coherence and the universal features of science which are indispensable for the culture of the mind and the growth of wisdom. It will now be understood that true culture and wisdom do not have their origin in the university, but in the faith of the student. The task of the university should be to cultivate the seeds of culture and wisdom. Without that religious approach, when finally all humanistic speculations have lost their fascination, science will be delivered up to mere specialisation, to senseless analysis or to pragmatism.

In addition to stating the true character of science, and confessing that the university is religion, the statement claims that the university should be staffed with men and women who are driven by their covenantal communion with God in Christ to form a learning community of faith at the university. As we have seen, the community of the university is the prerequisite for the student's study. The disintegration of humanism in our time has made authentic community at the modern university impossible.

Further, we must understand what it means when from their religious character we infer that science and study are free. On the standpoint of autonomy, freedom means being free from all

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outside interference in order to be entirely independent. On a scriptural standpoint not only does such a freedom not exist but the idea of it is exposed as slavery to a human idol. Christian freedom means to be free in Christ, to surrender to Him and thereby to be freed from such an idol as human autonomy. Such a freedom makes possible the response of faith to the religious status of the creation, and provides the context in which science can grow, where study has a perspective, and where both faith and science, together with the university itself, can maintain their true place and integrity within the creation.

The university has to form wise men and women of culture. For a Christian university Christ is wisdom, and growing in the image of God is the true culture of humanity. The cultivation of that wisdom and culture is the broader task of the university.

Here we touch upon a subject of immense scope. For our purpose, however, it is enough to point to the fact that in this, and in all the other instances dealt with above, the characteristic of the Christian university is its religious attitude and approach. These are the characteristics of wisdom: tolerance, moderation, knowledge of oneself, strength, a fine touch of reality and practical ability. We can describe these without at the same time subsuming them in our description of their reference point. But we can never avoid viewing them from such an angle. It is the religious view and approach that gives them their true meaning, and that means that together they are wisdom.

The secret of this approach, the secret of the university, science and study is **the Bible, — God speaking to the community of the university and everyone of its members, and to all who are willing to listen to Him.**

The university is related to the Lord's people. It is their responsibility to monitor the scriptural attitude and approach of the university. It is necessary therefore that the university develop methods and means for the exposition of its intentions, plans and results in understandable language, however

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difficult that may be. That public exposition of research and its results are an essential obligation for the university.

3.4. *The Antithesis.*

The Christian university, over against the liberal university, constitutes an antithesis. It is important to understand that the Christian university, once established, does not create this antithesis. From a spiritual angle the antithesis has been posited by the liberal university from its side by its adherence to its so-called neutral basis. The Christian is allowed neither to delight in the antithesis nor to avoid it. Whenever the duty to stand authentically against the basis of the liberal university does arise it is good to remember the words of Peter: "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men". (1 Peter 2:15).

At any rate, a battle has to be fought. That is not new in the field of science and the university. It has always been a battlefield. The important point is to understand that there are in the final analysis only two parties: one with the approach of the autonomy of man, and one with the approach of true religion. In this battle the Christian will meet with many difficult circumstances. I shall mention a few of them.

To walk upon an old and long-used road is of course far easier than to turn into a new road that has to be laid as one advances. This is especially difficult when the travellers are generally considered to be rather ridiculous. That is the reason so many Christians content themselves with walking on the old road and try to excuse themselves for doing so.

The second difficult circumstance is that not all Christians see the need of a Christian university. As a result that topic becomes a cause of conflict and confusion within their circles and ours.

Consideration of the third point will take us somewhat longer. Behind the antithesis in human life is the clear and radical antithesis between Christ and Satan. It is projected into the principles of man, and there also a rather distinct picture of

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the antithesis is displayed. These principles guide and motivate human life. Thus we find the antithesis in practical life in a mixed form, in the deeds of both the Christian and the non-Christian. The mixed character of the behaviour, and therefore the results, of both types of universities make it more difficult to explain the difference in practice.

But why should this argument always be used **against** the endeavour to erect a Christian university? Such unfair treatment is in fact derived from the wrong supposition that the liberal university is the normal one. The Christian, however, must look upon this state of affairs from the religious viewpoint. In doing so, the Christian should understand that the benevolence of God still connects apostate science with truth. That must not disquiet or trouble the Christian, but cause us to rejoice and strengthen us more and more to follow Christ. Augustine already knew that he could and ought to learn from the pagan philosopher. How are we to consider this? In my judgement it is not entirely correct to say something like: 'As a whole the theories originating in the mind of non-Christians are wrong, but we can nevertheless take pieces of truth from them'.

Every theory as a whole and in its parts is in some way or other related to truth. We should look at it from the religious angle in order to see the truth it contains. We should also look at it from the angle of the person or persons who formulated it in order to understand what is actually intended and how, and in what sense, it misconstrues the truth and may imply a further deterioration from the truth. There is nothing in a theory, or in a part of it, apart from its meaning. That is even valid for analysis, which is not identical with science. It is also true for the proposition that $2 \times 2 = 4$, and that A is A, because the question of the **meaning** of such simple laws transcends their senseless and factually impossible isolation.¹³

¹³ Cf. Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, *op cit*, 111-127.

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When we look at the present circumstances for the establishment of a Christian university, as I will do now, I conclude that **the prospects for such a university are neither better nor worse than in former times.** Generally speaking, we can say that the spirit of the university started in the neighbourhood of synthesis, and was ruled by the church, and as a consequence of that synthesis, humanism took over and in our time, as a consequence of humanism, the spirit of the university dwells in the neighbourhood of nihilism. That has resulted in a crisis of the university, of its community, the universality of science, scholarship, and the view of wisdom and culture. Here, of course, the Christian university at present has an immense advantage over the liberal one.

We must, however, not forget that humanism's advance from its optimistic belief in man towards nihilism has also changed its attitude towards religion from fighting it to neglecting it. That seems to be to the advantage of the Christian university — but a second look will show it is otherwise. Contemporary men and women have lost their trust and certitude. They distrust society and its development and are deprived of their own relation to the past. They are lonely and roaming in the dark, resigned to the fact that nothing can justify life, that nowhere can a valid norm be found, and that the search for meaning is vain. But the nihilism resulting from that situation is not a companion that they can stand for very long. The development of the philosophies of Heidegger, Sartre and Wittgenstein bear witness to that fact; nihilism can exist in man as a kind of modern '*Sturm und Drang*' phase only.

Sometimes despair and doubt serve to bring men and women to the Christian faith, but more often the agony makes place for another attitude. The despairing and doubting person comes to be regarded as more sober, honest and mature than his or her well-intentioned but 'idealistic' parents. It is a sign of the greater honesty of the sons and daughters that they resign themselves to their fate and conform themselves to the inevitable development of society. To escape from nihilism we in the twentieth century have had recourse to various concepts of community.

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The Christian university is therefore confronted with a world within which the sense of religion is almost lost and the antithesis is very suspect because it intends to destroy the community. In my opinion that situation, compared with former situations, is a disadvantage for the Christian university.

At the university we are met with many adversaries. Some arise from an over-estimation of the physical sciences, others from views of philosophy and culture which insist that man gives meaning to all that has meaning. The main antithesis remains between the religious approach and the approach of the autonomy of man.

I will now briefly return to those Christians who are not willing to join the Christian university movement but consciously and unconsciously join the forces of the enemy. This concerns in fact **a second type of antithesis**, the one within the community of Christians. I must confess that when I am dealing with these fellow Christians I am constantly in need of more understanding, more patience, a more cordial approach and more humility. It does not seem to me to be my fault alone but where these are absent it surely retards the cause of the Christian university.

Every Christian is inclined to oscillate between the choice of two starting points in life: the 'religious' and the 'secular' and therefore his or her perspective on life and approach to it swings between, and is mixed with, a horizontal and a vertical view, a 'worldly' and a 'religious' stance. That too is in fact an antithesis, occurring in every Christian's life. I will call it the **third type of antithesis**. The second type of antithesis arises when the Christian turns this twofold approach into a **principle**. In that case reality is viewed as consisting of two territories: one secular and one religious. One has to approach and view each separately. The first territory is that of human affairs science, politics, business, and so forth. It is generally thought that in this territory no essential differences exist between Christians and non-Christians. The fundamental difference exists in the territory of religion, of faith, and of the church. Some hesitation exists therefore among these

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Christians concerning the territory in which such items as family life, education, the school, friendships and marriage belong.

However, they deal with life as if they can live in two different modes. Some of them separate the territories, others try to reach a synthesis. At any rate they consider one of those territories as a field where man is on his own, where he is neutral towards religion. It is essentially the theme of supernature and autonomous nature that they have adapted. They do not understand the differences between this theme and what Kuyper called common grace. The first theme is based on the autonomy of nature, the second, common grace (better: the common goodwill of the Lord), which rejects all autonomy within the creation.

That the principle of autonomy is at work in the mind of many Christians when they consider science and the university, is not always clear, even to themselves. Their attitude is sometimes merely an inclination towards the secular view, or even no more than a resignation to their customary state of life.

We ought to recognise and reject the **worldly, neutral approach**. What betrays the non-religious approach in the case of Christians is not usually a secular concept of totality. It is rather the approach which arises from the pieces, from the facts, from the side of some unmistakable law. This method of dealing with the religious side points to an assumption that there is a **lack of difference** between Christians and non-Christians when viewing such a piece, fact, or law. They may then discriminate against the religious approach and stand for neutrality of science and the university, or confess that there must exist some bridge but that they don't know how to close the gap. But they will have many doubts and questions about the religious issue, and either way suffer from the same fault: **the wrong approach, or the approach from below**. That is the reason why **they will perhaps tolerate the idea of a Christian university but will never join its cause cordially**. Only from the religious view does the Christian university show itself as a calling.

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The opposition of fellow Christians to the idea of a Christian university has perhaps many sentimental reasons, but when these are cleared away, we may detect it in the approach taken to the problems themselves, and then trace it back further to the **principle of autonomy** which is active somewhere, perhaps hidden from view, perhaps unobserved, but still present in the fabric of their thinking. It is clear that this is one of the main obstacles in discussions between Christians concerning the Christian university.

Conclusions.

Up to now we have discussed the prospects for the Christian university from the limited viewpoint of its circumstances. Having little strength, the supporters of that university seem to meet with overwhelming difficulties and superior opposition. How can one believe in possible success, after looking at its failure-ridden history and comparing it with the invincible liberal university?

I have already told you that not the expectation of success but the obedience to God has to be our guide and motivation. It is indeed necessary to consider the question of success and failure, but in a religious sense. That enables us to understand the history of the liberal university, the reason for the failures of the Christian university and its final security. The first point has already been discussed at length. It appeared that the existence of the liberal university does not prove its success. At present it has lost many features of the structure of the true university and is in a state of crisis.

The failures of the Christian universities, together with all the failures of Christianity, can be traced back to the heart of the Christian. Upon the appearance at the horizon of only a glimmer of result of his activities, he is inclined to pursue some kind of independence and trust in that result. There and then he tries to cut the religious ties of the university, secularising it, forming an antithesis, cultivating some kind of

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autonomy, laying the foundation of an idol and starting the decline and death of the university, because here too “the wages of sin is death ...” (Romans 6:23).

Various possibilities for secularisation can be found at the university. The beginning is always small and unobservable. It can start somewhere in science or in philosophy, in the status of the university, in its organisation, in the recognition of its ability to investigate, in the quality or number of its graduates or in the mode of living at the university. Not only adaptation to the world but also isolation from it would be a sure sign that something is wrong with the university. The learned Christian especially has to guard against the seductive supposition that he or she belongs to the élite of Christianity. Such an élite class does not exist.

At the Christian university one must not be troubled about contempt, defamation and oppression from without. One must be prepared for them, and **the desire to avoid them at all costs may indeed indicate that spiritual compromise is at hand.**

It is not so easy for a Christian at the university to understand himself or herself as a pilgrim *en route* to a better place. No matter how difficult it may be, that must be the life and work of the Christian in higher education, **not alongside** that work, but **in** and **within** the fabric of the work itself. The well-being of the Christian university depends on it. Its members must understand that only on the rough, narrow road of the Kingdom of God, where Jesus Christ precedes them, and where they must lose themselves to be found back in Christ, can their university succeed, that is: display the coming Kingdom as already present and among us.

To be captivated by the **Word of God** is the core of this standpoint. It means at the same time that we understand that the future of the Christian university and of Christian science and scholarship does **not depend on us**. The work of those who carry on this task is redeemed by Christ and secure in God, with or without the approval of others.

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It is valid for the whole creation and therefore for the university too, that the LORD says: "For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another" (Isaiah 48:11). The sum and substance of starting and proceeding with a university is trust in God, and the knowledge that the conclusion of the whole matter is this: "Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

- the end -

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