

Educational associations in the Kuyperian tradition

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In a previous article we have explored colleges, universities and other institutions for higher education operating on a reformational program. It would be interesting, however, to have a look at other types of educational organisations: associations, foundations, centres, institutes and similar. Only the still operative educational organisations are indicated in bold. (I will not deal with theological associations but only with those offering extra-theological education.)

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The associations promoting Christian scholarship are often useful to those who may not be looking for a degree but would like to learn more about (or to contribute to) Christian thinking, to attend conferences or build a better Christian perspective on their own profession. In some cases, and for some people, an association can be more valuable and effective than a university or a college. As I have profited myself, in the past, from the services of several educational societies, I would like to testify that they are very important. Let us begin our survey from the Netherlands.

The Netherlands

• Higher education

Let us begin by mentioning an association which does not exist anymore, but played

a crucial role in the establishment of the Free University of Amsterdam and exercised ample influence in many other countries, including South Africa. This is the Association for Scientific Education on Reformed Foundation (*Vereniging voor Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs op Gereformeerde Grondslag*). The idea of associating for educational purposes is very old, and it has proved very effective.

Nowadays, however, there are new associations serving in this field. We may start from the **Reformed Scientific Society** (*Gereformeerde Wetenschappelijk Genootschap – GWG*). This is an “association of reformed academics” organising lectures and meetings, and publishing the academic journal, *Radix*. The latter has often hosted contributions by Dooyeweerdian scholars. On a more evangelical position is the **Foundation for Scripture-based Scholarship** (*Stichting Bybelgetrouwe Wetenschap – SBW*). Last but not least, one should mention the **International Christian Study-Centre** (*Internationaal Christelijk Studie-Centrum*) established in 1971.

• About philosophy

In the Netherlands one also finds specific organisations for the promotion of philosophy in the Kuyperian tradition. **The Association for Reformational Philosophy**, which operates since 1935, has recently been renamed as **Association for Christian Philosophy** (*Vereniging voor Christelijke Wijsbegeerte – VCW*), and counts at present about 600 members. It was founded by D.H. Th. Vollenhoven, H. Dooyeweerd and others and it still publishes the journal, *Philosophia reformata*. It organi-

ses international symposia (the 7th will take place in Amsterdam in August 2011) and it promotes philosophical reformational reflection worldwide.

The **VCW** is linked to two other organisations serving the same purpose with different tasks. We must therefore mention the **Centre for Reformational Philosophy** (*Sentrum voor Reformatorische Wijsbegeerte* – SRW) and the **Foundation for Reformational Philosophy** (*Stichting Reformatorische Wijsbegeerte* – SRW).

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The tasks of the centre consist in keeping a bookstore, managing the practicalities of conferences, et cetera. The foundation has, among other things, the task of dealing with the “special chairs” for reformational philosophy at various Dutch universities. In fact, the Dutch government allows the main philosophical associations to appoint lecturers of their choice at various universities (not to be confused with the “lectorates” mentioned in the previous article). At present, the CRW is entitled to “install” six lecturers at the following six universities: J. Hoogland: Twente University; R. Kuiper: Erasmus University, Rotterdam; M.J. de Vries: Delft University of Technology; M.J. Verkerk: Eindhoven University; G. Glas: Leiden University; and H. Jochemsen: Wageningen University for Agriculture.

Other lecturers hold special chairs or courses on reformational philosophy at the Free University (Amsterdam) and elsewhere.

• Primary and secondary education

Before concluding this section I would like to mention the organisation called **Unie/NZV**. The latter is the result of the union, achieved in 2004, of two associations working in the field of primary/secondary

education. One was founded in 1879 and was called *Een School met den Bijbel*. Later on, it was named *School en Evangelie* and continued to operate on a clear Kuyperian basis. It served in many countries (also in Africa) and had some interests in Christian politics as well. In 1992 this organisation was renamed *Unie voor Christelijk Onderwijs*, with many projects and partners. One of the partners was the *Nederlandsche Zondagschool Vereniging (NZV)*, founded in 1865. The union of these two organisations gave birth (in 2004) to the *Unie/NVZ*, operating with highly innovative educational methods both in schools and churches (Sunday schools).

England

Two reformational organisations can be mentioned in this part of the world. One is the **Christian Studies Unit (CSU)**, which provides several types of services to interested students and lecturers. The initiative is supported mainly through the efforts of Reverend Richard Russell (a minister of the Anglican Church) who has devoted much energy to the initiative.

The other organisation is the **West Yorkshire School of Christian Studies (WYSOCS)**, founded in 1986 on advice by John Stott. As member of IAPCHE, this initiative is also supported by the special dedication of David Hanson. The school is situated in the remarkable Outwood House, where regular courses are offered in the unique environment of Yorkshire. Let us now move to the American continent.

Some American outposts

One does not find similar associations in Canada, but one has to remember (see previous article) that in this country numerous university-colleges are available. However, I now have an opportunity to remember the old Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship (AACS) which served for many years and with success, under the dynamic leadership of academics like Evan Runner.

Moving to the USA, we find the **Association of Christian Philosophers**, of which Nicholas Wolterstorff has been the president for many years. Philosophers in the Kuyperian line have been traditionally good attendants of the initiatives of this association. We also find the **American Scientific Affiliation** (ASA), promoting Christian research especially in the natural sciences. It also has a keen interest in the creation-evolution debate.

As far as South America is concerned readers of *Word and Action* have recently (in nr. 407) enjoyed a report from Brazil by Guilherme de Carvalho, informing about the activities of the *Associação Kuyper para Estudos Transdisciplinares* (AKET – **Kuyper Association for Trans-disciplinary Studies**). This association is interesting, among other things, because it was born (only in 2004) in complete independence from any reformed circle. (Actually, the article contains some complaints about the indifference of the local Presbyterian churches.) De Carvalho is a Baptist minister and he is trying, with several co-workers, to spread Kuyperian ideas among Evangelicals and Pentecostals (in Brazil, 18% of a population of 200 million)! The vision is to “gather Christians together for the development of a neocalvinist intellectual community in Belo Horizonte and eventually in Brazil”. Now, if neo-Calvinism could spread beyond its traditional Dutch and reformed strongholds, into the vast Evangelical worlds of South America, Asia and Africa, how relevant could the consequences be?

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South Africa

The major reformational organisation in this field is the **Association for Christian**

Higher Education (*Vereniging vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys* – VCHO) based in Bloemfontein. The latter exists since 1950, it publishes the *Tydskrif vir Christelike wetenskap* (*Journal for Christian scholarship*) and has a membership of about 10 000 members.

In Potchefstroom one finds the **Koers Association** (*Koers Vereniging*), which was established especially in view of the publication of the academic journal, *Koers: bulletin for Christian scholarship*. Eventually, this association could be restructured to stimulate interaction between Christian scholars in the country. (In the past, in the South African context there was a richer variety of such associations but one must also consider that many of these were in the grip of the Christian-national approach.)

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Asia and Oceania

In Korea we can mention the **Institute for Calvinistic Studies in Korea** (ICSK) founded in 1985 and directed for many years by Professor Sungkuh Chung, a former student of the Free University of Amsterdam. Among the first “Counselors” of the Institute one finds Jan Dengerink and Evan Runner. We also find the **Korea Association for Christian Studies** (KACS). In Japan, an association organising conferences and studies on the Kuyperian legacy is the **Japan Calvinist Association** (JCA). The quality of the lectures delivered at their conferences is certainly impressive.

As far as Indonesia is concerned, Joshua Lie (a former student at ICS – Toronto) is the founder of the **Reformational World-view Foundation**; an association “where worship and learning become one” (as their motto recites).

In Australia, among the past organisations one can remember the Association for Christian Higher Education in Australia (ACHEA) which had a lively “twin”-organisation in New Zealand. This association merged around 2002 in the Christian Institute for Tertiary Education, with the purpose of establishing a reformed university in Victoria. Unfortunately the project could not be realised and at present the only reformational association I know of in this part of the world is **Amani Educational Services**. The latter is linked to the work of Joy and Stuart Fowler (another former Baptist minister) with links in Kenya and other African countries (“Amani” is a Ki-swahili word, meaning “peace”).

Reflections

Some types of educational associations could be implemented and used to a larger extent, also in South Africa. I am thinking especially of possible associations of lecturers and associations of students (which could be especially helpful in the context of non-Christian institutions). They could provide meetings and conferences, mutual encouragement and information, literature and so forth. This type of association does not require large investments or facilities, but it can be very effective.

While we can be thankful for the above achievements I would like to point out one obstacle to the establishment of Christian organisations in general. I am referring to the tacit assumption that involvement in

extra-ecclesiastical areas should be mainly an individual enterprise. This assumption is not accepted by all denominations, of course, or not to the same extent. Yet in some circles it remains a very popular and even dominant idea: Christians should work together in the church, but when it comes to politics or business they should act individually.

The organisations mentioned above offer a good example of what can be achieved when Christians start building together.

Most of the times, this individual involvement is conceived as joining non-Christian parties, unions, school boards, fraternities of all sorts with the task of offering a “testimony”. Unfortunately, such individual efforts often prove too heavy to be successful. True, in some cases individual involvement is the only possible option, and it should not be despised. Nevertheless, the organisations mentioned above offer a good example of what can be achieved when Christians start building together. The “bonus” is that often denominational differences will not necessarily hamper Christian cooperation outside of the church-institution. As pointed out above, Christians from different denominations who share an integral Christian worldview are able to work together to promote integral Christian scholarship.