

Reformational institutions for higher education

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Introduction

This is a third short article on reformational organisations worldwide. After exploring the world of politics and labour unions, let us now move to the world of higher education. How did the reformational movement perform in this field? Did it keep its promise to promote Christian action “in all areas of life”?

In this article I will focus mainly on colleges, universities and on the institutes or centres connected to them. I will not focus, for the moment, on the independent educational associations, foundations, societies and so on. (I will leave that topic for a next article.) As the aim of this series of articles is to discover organisations operating outside the more “traditional” areas of Christian service, I will also not deal with theological faculties or institutions.

This survey may be useful for different purposes: it may be used for group-discussion or as prayer-list. It may help us thinking of our needs in South Africa. Academics and students might contact one of these institutions to improve their understanding of a specific field of interest. More simply, this survey constitutes an update: some of us are quite informed about Christian organisations but often institutions and organisations change, merge or close their doors, while new ones are created. From time to time, it is important to dust our knowledge.

I still need to remind our readers that we are not dealing with all reformed organisations, but only with those who are close to the kuyperian tradition (in the following pages I will use the terms *kuyperian*, *reformational* and *neo-Calvinist* as synonyms).

Of course Christian schools and universities are organised in all the main branches of Christianity: Methodist, Baptist, Catholic and so on. But what makes a college or a university “Christian”? The answer differs in different Christian traditions. In some cases it will be argued that a university is Christian when its lecturers are members of a church (even better: of the clergy). Others will say it is Christian if it is controlled by a church-denomination. Still others will make sure that prayers and “religious” courses are added to the list of “normal” subjects.

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The kuyperian tradition regards these answers as insufficient. In fact, even when the lecturers are Christians and the students pray before each class, *the content* of education itself may remain fairly secular. The reformational approach insists on the content: we have sound Christian education when history, mathematics, psychology or journalism are taught and practiced in the light of the Word of God. In other words, Christianity is supposed to modify the content of education, not only to provide “decorations” in the form of chapel devotions or

ethical standpoints (of course important, but not the whole story). As a consequence, the reformational tradition has stressed the importance of an “inner reformation” affecting all disciplines. Compared to other standpoints, of course, this approach implies a more difficult task.

Nevertheless, the educational institutions mentioned below have endorsed that task. I have selected the ones which have either a statute declaring their reformational character or a significant presence of academics supporting a reformational approach in their fields of study. In the final section, however, I have also provided a list of institutions which are simply well-inclined towards reformational scholarship. Please note that only the institutions indicated in bold are still operating. Let us start from the Dutch experience.

The Netherlands

- **Classical and professional universities**

The cradle of Christian scholarship in the kuyperian tradition is the **Free University of Amsterdam**. Nowadays, unfortunately, this institution is not much committed to the initial ideals anymore, but it still counts among its staff members many academics in the “kuyperian line”. This is especially true for the philosophy department, which has a long tradition of reformational philosophy (Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven and their successors).

In recent years a new phenomenon must be considered: the Dutch government has favoured the creation of professional universities preparing for a career in journalism, social work, education and so on. This has provided an opportunity for some of the reformed *hogeschole* or *academies* to reach the status of universities offering under-graduate courses (in some cases also Masters).

There are at least three such universities or colleges in the reformational line. They are: the **Ede Christian University** (ECU), the **Christian University De Driestar** (CUDD, located in Gouda) and the **Reformed University of Zwolle** (RUZ). In a

more “evangelical” line one finds the **Evangelische Hogeschool** of Amersfoort (distinguished reformational scholars like Willem Ouweneel, have been lecturers there). These are institutions of modest size, but they offer excellent Christian education.

- **The “lectorates”**

It is interesting to mention the three Christian “Lectorates” recently established at these three universities. A lectorate is a scientific research and education unit directed by a professor and involving lecturers and professionals from diverse fields. Each lectorate aims at generating and applying research in a specific area of expertise while maintaining contacts with the relevant professional fields.

Apart from working with fellow-Christian institutions, the lectorates work with individual researchers and independent research centres, building an international network of professors and researchers in these fields.

The three lectorates are presently organised as follows. The lectorate “Ethics of care” is housed at the ECU and directed by Prof. H. Jochemsen. The lectorate “Social work” is housed at the RUZ and directed by Prof. R. Kuiper. The lectorate “Education and identity” is housed at the CUDD and directed by Drs. B. de Muynch. (Several lecturers of our North-West University have contacts with these universities and lectorates.) Apart from working with fellow-Christian institutions, the lectorates work with individual researchers and independent research centres. The long term project would be building an international network of professors and researchers in these fields.

USA and Canada

- **The University College**

Traditionally, the North American continent is fertile soil for the growth of private Christian schools and universities. I will provide, below, a short list of neo-Calvinist institutions. Let me first notice that unfortunately, in this part of the world no full-fledged university operates on a reformational basis. As it happened in Europe, here too some of the originally Christian

Universities have lost their Reformed character (one may think of prestigious institutions like Harvard and Yale). This should be a matter for reflection, even for us in South Africa.

Only the **Institute for Christian Studies** in Toronto offers post-graduate courses up to the doctoral level. (Unfortunately, in recent years one can notice that the postmodern “spirit” has left some marks on this institute.) However, today several Christian University Colleges are available in North America. Here is a short list:

College:	Located:	Founded:	Students:
Redeemer University College	Ancaster (Toronto area, Ontario)	1982	800
The King’s University College	Edmonton (Alberta)	1979	600
Trinity Western University	Langley (Vancouver area B.C.)	1962	4 000
Calvin College	Grand Rapids (Michigan)	1876	4 000
Dordt College	Sioux Centre (Iowa)	1955	2 000
Trinity University College	South Chicago area (Illinois)	1959	1 280
Kuyper College	Grand Rapids (Michigan)	1939	350

Universities can also host important institutes and initiatives. In this context it is interesting to mention the Pascal Centre at Redeemer College, established in 1988 to explore the links between science/scholarship and belief. We should also mention the Dooyeweerd Centre (also at Redeemer) promoting since 1994 the publication of the works of the Dutch philosopher (we will return to it in a next article). We should remember the yearly Kuyper Lectures at Dordt College and the Calvin Centre for Christian Scholarship at Calvin College.

years (i.e. from 1993). In 2008 Dordt was “tied #3” in the Midwest Region.

The commencement speaker at the 2005 opening ceremony was President G.W. Bush. In North America a network of such Colleges exists throughout states and provinces.

- **A few remarks**

As one can see, the number of students is often modest, but *US News* and *World Report* have kept Dordt College (for example) in the list of “America’s Best Colleges” for the last eighteen consecutive

Calvin College can boast, among its former lecturers, academics of the calibre of Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff or Evan Runner. The commencement speaker at the 2005 opening ceremony was President G.W. Bush. In other words, we are dealing with excellent and recognised institutions and they constitute the

tip of an iceberg, as in North America a network of such Colleges exists throughout states and provinces.

I would also like to mention a few sister-institutions which might be in a less dooyeweerdian “mood”, but produce excellent Christian scholarship, like **Geneva College** in Pennsylvania (founded 1840), **Gordon College** in Wenham (MA; 1889) or **Covenant College** in Georgia (1955).

Considering the difficulties encountered by larger Christian universities (like the FU and our own former PU for CHE), one may suspect that the college size may be a much better and effective way of promoting Christian scholarship.

South Africa

The former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education and the University of the Orange Free State at Bloemfontein have been for long years internationally well-known centres where reformational scholarship was cultivated (alongside other traditions, like the Christian-national one). The Potchefstroom University was Christian by statute, while Bloemfontein was Christian “informally”. Yet both produced Christian scholars of international status. Potchefstroom is the alma mater of the most eminent South African philosopher H.G. Stoker. One may also mention the glorious Institute for Reformational Studies, which served from 1962 to 1999, under the direction of Prof. B.J. van der Walt. Bloemfontein is the intellectual home of a champion of reformational philosophy like Prof. Danie F.M. Strauss. But what is the situation today?

The former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education is now the **Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University**, after a merger with the University of the North-West. The Christian character of the University is not there anymore (i.e. not on paper), but some of the schools and some academics are still contributing to the reformational tradition. This is especially true, at present, of the School of Philosophy.

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The Centre for Faith and Scholarship (*Sentrum vir Geloof en Wetenskap – SGW*) is a research centre where several scholars are busy exploring the connection between religious commitments and science/scholarship. The name of the centre has been recently modified and it is now the **Institute for Foundational Studies**. (Actually, it would be quite appreciated if the present Director of the Centre, Prof. M.F. Heyns, could introduce it to the readers of *Woord en Daad*.) This institute organises the annual H.G. Stoker Lectures, and the PUK Forum, which is hosted every year by a different faculty of the Potchefstroom Campus.

The same dedication to the Christian tradition one finds at Bloemfontein (now **University of the Free State**), where several academics support a kuyperian approach to scholarship in several faculties. For a recent update (concerning individual academics), of the history and present situation of reformational philosophy in South Africa (and worldwide) one can consult the article by B.J van der Walt “ad Fontes” published in the *Journal for Christian Scholarship* (2007 (3-4)).

Asia and Australia

When we move to countries like South Korea, although there are excellent Christian universities the neo-Calvinist presence is not as strong as in the countries mentioned above. Nevertheless, one can find kuyperian academics in this country too (in many cases they have studied in Amsterdam, some of them in South Africa as well). They are present mainly at **Chongshin University** (in Seoul), **Kosin University** (in Busan) and

Baekseok University (in Cheon-an). Several reformational scholars can also be found in Japan, at the **Tokyo Christian University**.

As far as Australia and New Zealand are concerned, in the past there have been several initiatives and organisations, while today the situation seems to be less dynamic. Until 2002 the Christian Institute for Tertiary Education tried to establish a reformed university in Victoria. Unfortunately the project could not be realised and at present there is not yet a reformational college or university operating in this part of the world. The only institution one may mention is the **National Institute for Christian Education** (NICE) in which a few reformational academics were (at least initially) involved.

Regional and international organisations

The contacts between Christian institutions are also of crucial importance and need to be organised. Most of the colleges mentioned above are affiliated to the **Christian Coalition of Colleges and Universities** (CCCU) in North America. The Coalition counts more than 100 member institutions. One should also mention **Christian Schools International** (CSI), the North American **Association of Reformed Institutions of Higher Education** (ARIHE) and the **Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools** (OACS).

Finally, a truly international organisation, is the **International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education** (IAPCHE), originally founded in 1975 (with a different name). IAPCHE has also several “regional expressions”, an African one in particular, namely the **Centre for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education in Africa** (CPCHEA). IAPCHE publishes an academic journal, facilitates the contacts between Christian scholars and organises regional and international conferences.

By having a look at the list of its members and associates one gets a good idea of the institutions (worldwide) which are (to various degrees) well-inclined towards

reformational scholarship. In the next section I would like to mention some of them.

Kuyperian outreach for Christian education

In 1990, while several communist regimes were collapsing in Eastern Europe, the Hungarian reformed churches took the opportunity to ask for the reaccreditation of several educational institutions, many of which had been closed during the previous 40 years. The most prominent of these institutions is today the **Karoli Gaspar Reformed University**, situated in Kalvinter (Calvin Square), Budapest. The process of reaccreditation and expansion was perfectly successful, so that this is now a multifaculty institution.

From the 1990s IAPCHE organised several conferences in Hungary, one of them in the city of Debrecen. This “Calvinist Rome” of Hungary is the main city of the eastern part of the country, where some two million people have kept their reformed faith during the communist regime. Debrecen is also the seat of an ancient **Reformatus Collegium** (founded in 1538, also situated in a Calvin Square). In this case too, the College was reopened and reaccredited in the early 1990s and is today fully active.

A few similar reformed colleges operate in Hungary, and registration is in high demand. On average, for every student enrolled the applications of two more students have to be declined for lack of infrastructure. We can mention the colleges of **Papa** (founded 1531), **Kolozswar** (1622), **Nagyenyed** (1632) and **Sárospatak** (1531) with a collection of 6 000 ancient and priceless volumes.

A few similar institutions operate in Romania (often related to Hungarian reformed communities). In the meantime, IAPCHE has also established contacts in many other Eastern European countries and in Russia (e.g. the **Russian American Christian University** – RACU).

In Africa, the **Daystar University** (Nairobi – Kenya), the small **University of Jos**

(Nigeria), together with **Mkar University** (in Mkar – Nigeria) have regular contacts with reformational circles.

In South America the growing numbers of protestants have stimulated the creation of several new universities. Among them one may mention the **Reformed University of Barranquilla** (Colombia – also known as *Corporacion Universitaria Reformada*), the **Universidad Evangelica de Las Americas** (Costa Rica). In this area there are seven or eight similar institutions, recently grouped in a coalition.

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Finally, one should pay some attention to Indonesia, a country with a Muslim majority but with some 10% of Christians (many from the Dutch-Reformed tradition). Nowadays IAPCHE maintains contacts with several Indonesian institutions, and two universities have traditionally shown openness to reformational scholarship. They are the **Duta Wacana Christian**

University (in Yogyakarta) and the **Satya Wacana Christian University** (Salatiga). More recently one can mention the **Artha Wacana Christian University** (in Kupang), the **Universitas Kristen Indonesia** (Jakarta) and the **Universitas Kristen Krida Wacana** (Jakarta-Barat).

Conclusion

Kuyperian Christianity is sometimes accused of being “triumphalistic”. Let us therefore clarify that this series of articles does not aim at boasting about anything, but rather at inspiring thankfulness and renewed action. On the other hand these few notes would also like to stimulate some reflection. Nowadays most Christian denominations are quite active with evangelisation and mission. Unfortunately, it is often forgotten that the Christian mission should include, for example, the political and educational dimensions.

The sort of spirituality which is booming today is mainly interested in “souls” (not in the entire human being). It is often hostile to intellectual activities and pietist in nature, pragmatist and dualist at the same time. It promotes a “restricted version” of the Christian life. At present, it affects all denominations. Will the rich tradition of Christian educational institutions survive the tide and reach the next generations?

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