



Teaching journalism prior to and after the demise of Christian higher education at Potchefstroom

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Abstract

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This article explores how the step-by-step changes to the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (resulting in the merger with the University of the North-West to form the North-West University [NWU]) impacted on the teaching of journalism at the Potchefstroom Campus. It was particularly relevant in 2009, as 50 years of teaching journalism and other communication subjects were celebrated by the School of Communication Studies on the Potchefstroom Campus of the NWU. The article thus also has a definite historiographical intention – more specifically as an attempt at writing micro-historiography. It aims to illustrate how a definite Christian perspective on journalism was substituted for a slimmer “value-driven” approach sans an explicit religious dimension. Although it has been suggested by the vice-chancellor that lecturers had the right to express their views in class (including views based on Christian principles), it is argued here that the termination of the formal Christian approach made it very difficult, if not impossible, for lecturers to continue as in the past. As a result of the value-driven approach professional and institutional ethical codes are now used as a basic point of departure. This, however, does not satisfy those who prefer a more fundamental Christian approach to journalism. It is suggested that if this reading of the situation was erroneous, perhaps those Chris-

tians with a more positive view of the “name change” could give clearer leadership on how Christian perspectives on science (and journalism) can realistically be accommodated in the curriculum.

Opsomming

Die onderrig van joernalistiek voor en na die beëindiging van Christelike hoër onderwys op Potchefstroom

Hierdie artikel ondersoek hoe die stap-vir-stapverandering by die Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys (wat uitgeloop het op die samesmelting met die Universiteit van Noordwes om die Noordwes-Universiteit [NWU] te vorm) ’n invloed gehad het op joernalistiekopleiding op die Potchefstroomkampus. Dit is besonder relevant in die konteks van die 50-jarige viering in 2009 van joernalistiek- en kommunikasieopleiding deur die Skool vir Kommunikasiestudies op die Potchefstroomkampus. Die artikel het dus ’n pertinent historio-grafiese bedoeling – meer spesifiek is dit ’n poging tot mikro-historiografie. Dit streef daarna om aan te toon hoe ’n definitiewe Christelike perspektief op die joernalistiek plek gemaak het vir ’n verskraalde, religieuse “waardegedrewe” benadering. Alhoewel die visekanselier van die NWU meen dat dosente die reg het om hulle standpunte in die klas te stel (insluitend standpunte gegrond op Christelike beginsels), word hier aangevoer dat die beëindiging van ’n formele Christelike benadering dit baie moeilik, indien nie onmoontlik nie, gemaak het om voort te gaan soos in die verlede. As ’n uitvloeisel van die waardegedrewe benadering word professionele en institusionele etiese kodes nou as vertrekpunte gebruik. Maar dit bevredig nie diegene wat verbind is tot ’n meer fundamenteel-Christelike benadering tot die joernalistiek nie. Daarom word gesuggereer dat indien hierdie siening van sake foutief is, diegene met ’n meer positiewe kyk op die “naamsverandering” duideliker leiding kan gee oor hoe Christelike perpektiewe op die wetenskap (en joernalistiek) realities gesproke binne die leerplan geakkommodeer kan word.

1. Introduction and problem statement

During 2009 the School of Communication Studies of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) celebrated 50 years of teaching journalism and communication as university subjects. It is naturally also a time to reflect on the past and plan for the future. In this article, which is offered as part of this special communications edition of *Koers*, we focus on a specific dimension of the institutional history of this school/department, namely how the demise of Chris-

tian higher education at Potchefstroom impacted on the teaching of journalism.

The objective is thus not to give a full account of how journalism was taught over the past five decades; it is not the purpose to argue the case for Christian universities or all of the complicated dimensions of journalism as normative activity. Even less so is it the time or place to explore the different aspects of a reformed Christian worldview. This can and has been done elsewhere, to some extent by the present authors and in much more detail and clarity by many other Christian scholars. Our sole objective is, though, to give some insight into a slice of history which may be of little importance in the greater scheme of things, but continues to impact on the teaching of journalism within this school at this campus. As such it is hardly of no consequence.

Given the delicate nature of the merger which saw the demise of Christian Higher Education as formal philosophical framework at the Potchefstroom Campus of the now North-West University, it is necessary to state from the outset that the reasons why the Council and management of the PU for CHE accepted the new dispensation without public protest, is not at issue here. (Whatever opposition they may have offered in negotiations has not been made public up to now and is not relevant to our version of what happened.) What *is* relevant, is the consequences of a decision which certainly did not originate from within the PU for CHE.

This article thus offers a personal perspective of two lecturers who have been involved in teaching journalism within this school for a total of 25 years. As such it is offered as a micro history and could form part of a larger (institutional) history which may be researched in the future. Furthermore, it is offered as a form of participant observation, i.e. a study in which the researchers actively participated and even contributed. Strydom (2005:277) is thus relevant when he notes that “since the researcher is involved over a period of time with a particular situation, the scientific notion of objectivity may become a special problem”. For those researchers, as is the case with the present authors, who do not subscribe to a positivistic paradigm, it is less of a problem. However, we are fully aware of any concerns regarding reliability and validity in an article where the authors are (or were) active players.

Two remarks will suffice: sources are all attributed and can be verified, and normative or other conclusions are not offered as “objective”; the reader knows from the outset that the authors were/are

participants and can judge our article as such. We thus acknowledge our subjectivity, but believe it should not be a disqualification of our views per se – certainly not in a journal which is founded upon the notion of Christian scholarship and normative thought.

2. Background

The roots of the former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PU for CHE) can be traced back to 1869 when a theological school was founded by the Reformed Church (*Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika*) in Burgersdorp (Van der Schyff, 2003:1-17; Combrink, 2007). Later, after the devastation of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, the institution moved to Potchefstroom (Van der Schyff, 2003:79). In 1951 it became a fully-fledged, independent university (Van der Schyff, 2003:581-600), the only Christian university in South Africa. Soon thereafter, in 1959, journalism became a scholarly subject, first within the Department of History and from 1965 within a fully-fledged Department of Press Science (*Perswetenskap*) (Vyftig, 2009). (This Department was the first in South Africa to offer Journalism at first-year university and B.A.-level and it was as such a pioneering development.)

The Department broadened its scope and grew rapidly. Later, in the 1970s, it was renamed as the Department of Communication Sciences, then the Department of Communication and eventually the School of Communication Studies. Today it is by no means the largest department/school of its kind in South Africa, but remains a strong component of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the Potchefstroom Campus of the NWU. It draws students from all over the country and Namibia, and delivers graduates who are prominent practitioners in various media and corporate communication fields.

3. The PU for CHE merged

In 2003 the ANC government decided to terminate the PU for CHE as independent Christian institution by merging it with the historically black University of the North-West. In 2002, notably 92% of students at the Potchefstroom University voted *against* the “name change” of the PU for CHE (Du Preez, 2002; Rademeyer, 2003). Formal protest from the university’s leadership was not forthcoming.

The newly merged North-West University (NWU), that came into being on 1 January 2004, with campuses at Potchefstroom, Mafikeng and Vanderbijlpark, symbolised a new era in higher education in South Africa. This step was part of the Minister of Education’s

plan to transform the higher education system in the country by merging 36 tertiary institutions into 21 higher education institutions. This restructuring process was, according to her, aimed at ensuring an equitable, sustainable and productive higher education system (Pandor, 2005). While this may have been so in most cases, the merging of the only Christian university in the country was not comparable with, say, the merging of Vista University with a variety of universities countrywide. One also cannot but note that some ailing universities, such as Fort Hare, were not merged, and the Cape Peninsular *gained* one university through the merger of the Peninsular Technikon and the Cape Technical College.

Although the removal of the PU for CHE's "surname", i.e. CHE, from the name of the institution was one of the most dramatic changes in recent years (Combrink, 2007), no strong *public* opposition to this radical step emerged from the ranks of the PU for CHE, although it may well have occurred behind the scenes. The staff and students were convinced by the University leadership that the Council had no legal grounds to resist the termination of the country's only Christian university. It was argued that it was prudent to avoid confrontation and negotiate the best deal possible. This "deal" was that the new NWU was to be a "value-driven" university where Afrikaans, the main language at the PU for CHE, was to have a rightful place – particularly at the Potchefstroom Campus.

The merger was severely criticised, inter alia by Dr. Pieter Mulder, leader of the Freedom Front Plus and former head of the Department of Communication Sciences at the PU for CHE. He said the merger and change of the institution's name was a step backwards for the Christian and Afrikaans community, as well as for minority rights in the country. The labour union Solidarity described it as a classic example of a situation where democracy bowed before the ideology of transformation (Rademeyer, 2003).

This was all done in terms of the government's new Religion in Education Policy, which was adopted in 2003. The motivation behind the policy was that the government views religious education as the responsibility of religious bodies, home and the family, as long as this was practised within the limits of the Constitution, e.g. not racist (ANC, 2003) – not of schools or other education institutions. The state is not a religious organisation and must maintain neutrality in this respect in all public institutions, including educational institutions. Therefore, the emphasis has shifted from religious (Christian) education under the previous regime to religion in education,

i.e. to teach learners about religion and religions in the quest to “pass on this (South Africa’s) rich religious heritage” (ANC, 2003).

The Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor (2005), stated clearly that religious education is not what the government endeavours to offer:

What we can say with conviction is that both ‘science’ and ‘religion’ are positive components in the building of our new democracy. You cannot have the one without the other. In the Department of Education we are committed to teaching, in our schools, the best of science and the best of religious diversity, that is, the teaching of religion in education and not religious education.

Private institutions, on the other hand, “may propagate their own ... form of religion should they so wish, but this must not exclude the promotion of religion education to all South African learners”.

Whatever the arguments, the merging of the universities represented a break with history and the end of the PU for CHE as a Christian institution.

4. Values at the NWU

It was argued that although the new NWU was not a Christian university, it would be possible to continue teaching Christian perspectives (at least at the Potchefstroom Campus), as long as other viewpoints were also accommodated (cf. Combrink, 2007). Given the fact that the rector of the PU for CHE (Dr. Theuns Eloff) became the NWU’s first principal and set the tone to some extent, many believed that all was well.

In support of a so-called value march, Prof. Annette Combrink, rector of the Potchefstroom Campus of the NWU, remarked (Van Heerden, 2006):

Weens die onlangse samesmelting is die universiteit wetlik verplig om af te sien van die ‘CHO’ in sy naam. Inteendeel, die CHO moet voortleef in die harte van mense.

Due to the merger the university is compelled by law to drop ‘CHE’ from its name. However, this does not mean that the Christian character will disappear. On the contrary, the CHE must live on in people’s hearts.

Although it by no means constituted the essence of the PU for CHE’s character, the traditionally opening of the academic day with

Scripture and prayer was symbolically important to those lecturers and students who subscribed to the Christian character of the university. It was thus significant when the few moments of devotion in many (but not all) cases made way for a “moment of silence”. However, Eloff (2009) points out that all official meetings such as those held by the Senate or University Council as well as graduation ceremonies at all campuses are opened with Scripture reading and prayer. This implies that at a symbolic level some practices of the PU for CHE were carried into the new institution.

At ground level the new dispensation did have a very real effect. While students were never required to be Christians, lecturers could in the past assume that students were either Christians or at least accepted the general Christian ethos of the university. Any reference to Christian or Biblical points of view now had to be “balanced” with those of other religions, depending on the constitution of the class. In order to circumvent unpleasant challenges from non-Christians, the Christian approach to teaching journalism had to change to a mere “normative” approach. But Eloff (2009) contradicts this assumption and argues that this (normative approach) was never spelt out in official policy. It may well have been an erroneous deduction by the authors, given the prominence given to “values” by the new management. However, this still leaves the crucial question of how to promote a Christian approach to journalism if one no longer teaches within an environment which encouraged a Christian approach and how to hold on to an approach which was effectively overrun by a secular approach.

In 2007, the NWU launched its value project, specifically subscribing to the values of human dignity, equity, freedom, integrity, tolerance, respect, commitment to excellence, involvement in science, academic freedom and justice. The core “do values” are integrity, commitment, respect and accountability, and were explained in the internal publication *eKampusnuus* (NWU, 2007). No mention was made of any religion or religious context. The values are set out in the university’s vision and mission – again without any mention of religious context, and as such could be seen as a negation of its previous religious foundation. However, Prof. Combrink disagrees with this point of view. She claims that student life as well as the general working of the NWU was still “strongly embedded in Christianity” through observing Scripture reading and prayer at all formal university functions, religious organisations, et cetera. (Combrink, 2007). And at a PUK Forum meeting in 2008, the vice-chancellor, Dr. Theuns Eloff, expressed the view that a Christian approach was still

possible in the class. This view was challenged by several participants. This pointed at a clear difference of opinion between what was *perceived* to be possible (by the vice-chancellor) and what (some) lecturers found to be possible. Fact is that whatever an individual (Christian) lecturer wanted to do in class, this was governed not only by laws or policies, but also by a prevailing climate. To ignore the latter is not realistic, certainly not for the individual lecturer.

5. Teaching journalism at the PU for CHE

From 1958 until 2003 journalism was taught at the PU for CHE in terms of the freedom given to the University by an act of Parliament (Van der Schyff, 2003:582-600). As a Christian university, the PU for CHE was free to teach journalism (and any other subject) based on a reformed Christian understanding of Biblical principles and norms as they pertain to all spheres of life. Eloff (2009) points out that the possible tension between the constitution of 1994/1996 and the PU for CHE's private act needs to be examined if one is to gauge whether the new constitution had an impact on the PU for CHE's academic and/or religious freedom. Furthermore, Eloff (2009) argues that the Minister of Education repealed the private act on which the PU for CHE was founded long *before* the merger. He further insists that the "change of name" did not bring about any fundamental changes.

These technical arguments with philosophical implications are indeed salient and will have to be investigated further in future if we are to fully understand what happened at the PU for CHE after 1994. This article is, however, primarily interested in describing and explaining how it was experienced at ground level and how it impacted on the teaching of a specific subject.

At the PU for CHE journalism was, since its inception in 1959, taught as a profession and a calling. The founder, Prof. Gert Pienaar, and ethics lecturer of many years, Prof. Calvyn Snyman, did much of the initial groundwork. After they retired, other lecturers continued the tradition – only to *some* extent, as not all shared their particular passion for a Christian approach to communication studies in general or journalism in particular. To motivate the continuation of such an approach, one of the present authors, who had been responsible for ethics and media philosophy since 1991, stated in an internal document (Froneman, 2002a):

We do not train students to make as much money as possible with as little effort as possible. This many secular institutions do very well. We endeavour to shape students as whole persons, well-rounded individuals who will, conscious of their calling, go out to make a difference. We try to equip them to be thoughtful practitioners. We further endeavour to equip them, intellectually and otherwise, to practise their careers in a well thought-out manner. This entails, among other, the following:

- The critical study of theories that is compatible with Christian values.
- The critical study of theories that are in conflict with Christian values.
- The development of models/theories and thoughts that give substance to our points of view and which give students a point of departure and a normative handle on their discipline.
- Contextual studies from a perspective that fully allows a Biblical view on reality.

In this framework, issues such as Biblical anthropology, ontology and epistemology will be relevant. In practice this could mean that:

- Students are equipped to understand that journalism is a calling;
- The journalist serves his/her fellow man through information, interpretation, commentary and entertainment;
- In this process, the journalist orientates his/her fellow man to make informed choices and live as individuals conscious of their calling.
- Media models, key issues such as “objectivity”, the profit motive and, of course, media ethics are relevant and require decisions, which could be made in terms of a Christian model.

If students are not confronted with these possibilities, they accept the secular menu as the only available one. That is the difference a Christian approach to media makes at a Christian university.

The memorandum concluded that the content of modules and programmes can and ought to look different from other (secular) approaches which on critical points are in conflict with a Christian ap-

proach. This was the case in at least some of the modules offered. However, as the University grew and even before the 2004 merger became ideologically less coherent, this approach was criticised internally and even marginalised by some lecturers.

Lecturers and senior academics who were professing Christians but failed to understand the *raison d'être* explained above, posed a number of questions, including one regarding the technical aspects of a media practitioner's work: Could this really be "Christian"? Is there a *Christian* camera angle, a *Christian* way of typing or holding a pen? These were obviously facetious questions. Techniques were never taught in isolation; they fit into the bigger picture. Those who denigrated the idea of a "Christian university" (or an institution founded more loosely on Christian principles) "because technical activities cannot be Christian", missed the point.

However, it had to be acknowledged that some modules or study units had a strictly technical nature and consequently no overt value dimension. To separate the technical side from the broader whole, would, however, be a mistake and compartmentalise the programme, the memo argued. A camera angle is indeed a technical matter, but the *effect* of camera angles is by no means neutral. In the final analysis the issue was not a "neutral" technique, but a value-laden product that had a certain effect. As such, technical matters cannot be severed that easily from communication's value dimension, it was argued (Froneman, 2002a).

The implications of a Christian approach to journalism was taught to generations of undergraduate and graduate students, at least from 1991 to the present, and are spelt out in some detail by Froneman (2002a). Many issues were addressed within this context, including:

- striving to tell the truth through sound story ideas;
- responsible and ethical news gathering methods, also including the matter of deception – a particularly difficult issue in journalism, because to get to the truth, deception could be necessary (Lee, 2005:92). However, the question arises whether utilitarian view of "a means to an end" and "the greater good" fits into a Christian perspective;
- the use of several relevant sources to ensure balanced reporting;
- constructing a story in a meaningful way;

- taking, editing and using photographs and graphics in a responsible manner;
- sensitive sub-editing, headlines, posters;
- thoughtful interpretation and sound Biblically informed comment;
- choosing a variety of guest writers (including those who offered a Christian perspective);
- writing well-informed, critical, but fair reviews (from a Christian perspective);
- writing about the church with insight and empathy;
- treating advertisements as part of the total package;
- the need for editorial leadership; and
- treating readers with respect and as partners.

These issues are clearly not exclusive to a Christian discourse on journalism. The point is that these issues represent *seemingly* “normal” steps in the ongoing journalistic process, but in reality demand normative decisions which fundamentally change the outcomes. As such they demand thoughtful consideration by Christian journalists, if they care to give substance to their work which is in line with their professed faith and normative framework. The latter remarks about a normative approach is certainly not exclusive to Christians.

A number of academic dissertations, articles, popular articles and columns (e.g. on ekerk.co.za), a handbook and diverse chapters in books were published by academics and students of the School of Communication Studies (and its predecessors), e.g. Snyman (1985, 1994; s.a.), Froneman (1993; 1994a; 1994b; 1995a; 1995b; 1995c; 1996; 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; 1998; 2000a; 2000b; 2002b; 2002c; 2002d; 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2004d; 2005; 2006), Froneman and De Beer (1993; 1998), Van Vlastuin (1998), Van Vlastuin and Froneman (1999; 2002), Froneman and Swanepoel (2004), Froneman, Swanepoel and Van Rooyen (2005), Swanepoel (2003); Swanepoel, Fourie and Froneman (2006; 2007).

Furthermore, clearly formulated outcomes in study guides explained and underpinned a Christian approach to journalism at the PU for CHE, e.g. “Aan die einde van hierdie leereenheid moet jy in staat wees om te kan aantoon hoe Christene by verskillende publikasies hul waardes laat neerslag vind of nie” (Froneman, Gerber & Van Rooyen, 2003:9).

In the 2009 study guide for the honours theory, module KOMJ612, the following (watered-down) outcome remained: “(The learner should be able to) analyse media models in view of a Christian perspective on the media.” The outcome was retained on grounds that the honours class is a small group of senior students where divergent views could be accommodated and discussed easier than in large undergraduate classes of more than 100 students. Moreover, the section on Christian perspectives is optional. This is done to eliminate any accusations that a Christian perspective is forced on students. Again, this was not enforced by a decision by senate. Eloff (2009) correctly argues that this seems to be what the authors perceived to be practical. In the absence of other guidance or directives, we believe this was inevitable.

Contact with like-minded colleagues from institutions such as the Christelijke Hogeschool Ede in The Netherlands, Calvin College in Michigan, USA, Olivet Nazarene University in Illinois, USA, and colleagues in the media industry supported and strengthened our commitment to formulate a balanced approach to journalism education – an approach which took full cognisance of all professional requirements *and* reformed worldview imperatives.

Lecturers were always confronted by the realities of a changing South Africa, never more so than in the transformational period subsequent to the first fully democratic election in 1994. The lack of Christian publications, in particular the lack of a strong Christian approach to journalism in mainstream (Afrikaans) media (notwithstanding a large number of committed Christians – even former ministers of religion – in editors’ chairs) was a reality which always placed a constraint on the teaching of journalism from a Christian perspective.

In the post-2003 period, journalism teachers at the Potchefstroom Campus of the NWU were confronted by the following opportunities and constraints:

- **Christian media in South Africa**

There are a number of non-mainstream Christian media institutions in South Africa, including printed media, radio stations and e-publications. Church newspapers include *Southern Cross* and *Kerkbode*. *Christian Action Magazine* and *Kerkbode* are offered on the internet and several Christian/religious radio stations, both national (e.g. Radio Pulpit/Kansel) and community, are on the air. Several women’s Christian magazines, e.g. *Finesse*, *Soul*, *Intiem* (bridging the

gap between religion and sex), find a market in need of Christian perspectives.

One of these magazines, *Lééf!*, achieved top honours at the annual ADmag Awards on 6 April 2006 in the best religious/Christian magazine category for excellence in content and visuals within a year (Bizzcommunity.com, 2006). In reaction, Christine Ferreira, editor of *Lééf!*, remarked, “It reiterates the need for a magazine such as *Lééf!* ... and the core values it represents. It also shows that the market is receptive to a magazine that stands unapologetically for strong Christian values” (Bizcommunity.com, 2006). In 2009 a quarterly supplement for men was added to *Lééf!*, indicating that the magazine was successful (Anon., 2009).

All these media (and many other smaller publications) need Christian journalists who are trained in the best principles of good, professional journalism, but who also have a clear understanding of what a Christian worldview entails and how it impacts on our lives, particularly via the media.

- **Training for a niche market?**

Unfortunately the Christian media is not well developed in South Africa and offer too few career opportunities to accommodate all our students, and students have broader career objectives. Thus, whereas some international Christian institutions (some self-funded and others making use of funds provided by the state from taxes), train journalists specifically for this market, we cannot limit ourselves accordingly. Furthermore, we do not wish to do so. Although many of our graduates choose careers in Christian media, we endeavour to train students who can balance competing duties – wherever they are. Therefore, we would ideally like to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills, including life skills, to stay *faithful* in the secular mainstream media. To suggest that this was the church’s role, as some critics do, is to miss the point of an integrated reformed worldview.

We hope that students will use their skills to proclaim the Lordship of Christ in all spheres of life. While we cannot include this objective in our school’s mission statement, we do lead students to discover that a journalist’s worldview has a profound effect on his/her choices, and that “objectivity” cannot be achieved because every journalist operates from a subjective frame of reference, which is strongly influenced by his/her religious background. Therefore we favour the notions of fairness and balance within the broader framework of

accuracy as opposed to the highly problematic notion of “objectivity”, which is still propagated by some (but not all) secular journalism departments.

Fisher’s (1998) statement that “bias cannot be eradicated from a journalist’s brain but should be embraced in each reporter’s own style”, is an important acceptance of reality which, with some caveat, we support. A news editor, for example, makes decisions from a certain framework and all decisions require choices. These choices are influenced by his/her worldview – whom he/she chooses to cover a story, and which stories are prioritised. Similarly, a journalist decides which angle to take from his/her particular worldview. We believe that accepting one’s presuppositions and striving to still be fair and balanced is preferable to ignoring the reality of one’s biases – as those propagating “neutrality” and “objectivity” more often than not, do.

When we teach students at the NWU how to make choices in journalism, we do so within the framework of existing professional and institutional ethical codes. There are many guidelines in these codes which clarify how an ethical journalist should practise journalism. We make it clear that many of the principles in these codes are strongly related to a Christian worldview (without excluding reference to other religions). This implies that the journalist respects and promotes the interests of his/her fellow man. This is an ethical journalism grounded in the said codes and the Constitution. We, nevertheless, believe it is, in the final analysis, grounded in a Biblical worldview that demands our first loyalty.

This approach could raise the question whether an ethical approach is not sufficient. As indicated above, we believe the whole of the journalistic process demands decisions and is value-laden. The notion of a neutral journalism that merely needs a bit of ethics occasionally to keep it on the straight and narrow, is pernicious. It relegates the moral dimension of journalism to the periphery. Soon it then becomes an optional add-on and takes a minor role while “really important” demands (such as profitability) gets capulted into the forefront – as has happened to journalism in South Africa during the past decade or more. The result is a marked growth in populist newspapers and magazines which more often than not ignore the basics of good, ethical journalism – and get away with it.

It is not difficult to pinpoint unethical, amoral journalism. It is more difficult to criticise journalism that adheres to the basics of good, ethical journalism, but is grounded in worldviews that subtly

undermine the fundamentals of at least certain points of departure of a Christian worldview. Furthermore, it is not always easy to exactly pinpoint what “Christian journalism” (or journalism based on fundamental Christian perspectives) should be. How good, ethical journalism differs from good journalism based on Christian perspectives is indeed an ongoing question. We therefore sympathise with Fisher (1998) when he asks:

So what is Christian Journalism? ... Is it, as professor Don Piper says, ‘just good journalism’? Or is it simply a matter of placing more devout Christians in the media workplace? And which workplace should that be – mainstream newsrooms or the separate, Christian news world of CBN News, the USA Radio Network or Christianity Today?

Fortunately Christian scholars such as Kennedy (1972), Van Delden (1990; 2004), Van Velzen (1990), Velema (1991), Olasky (1996), Atwood (1998), Drake (1998), Henry (1999), Phillips (2001), Woiwode (2003), Van den Breevaart and Van den Woudenberg (2004), Blokhuys (2004), Krankendonk (2004) and De Vries (s.a.) have in the past strived to uncover what a Christian journalism (or a journalism permeated by Christian perspectives) could mean. This discourse continues. Furthermore, scholars such as Christians *et al.* (1993) stimulate fellow Christians even though they do not necessarily write within a narrow Christian paradigm. Stoker (1967; s.a.), Spykman (1985), Van der Walt (1991) and Wolters (1992), to name but a few, have provided important insights into a reformed worldview and its implications for Christian scholars. Quentin Schultze of Calvin College in the USA became an appreciated colleague and mentor via his books (cf. Schultze, 2002). Apart from the above-mentioned contributions from Dutch scholars and journalists, the history of Christian dailies in The Netherlands under the editorship of Van der Ros (1993) has inspired us to believe that a Christian journalism was more than a philosophical dream, but a possibility. Also in The Netherlands, former student and colleague, Evert van Vlastuin of *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, has continued to be an appreciated correspondent. Students from Potchefstroom and the Christelijke Hogeschool Ede in the Netherlands (e.g. Ferreira, 2001; Van Harten, 2005 and M.A. candidate Elbie Els), has through the years accepted the challenge to become fellow-travellers on the road to a better understanding of our calling.

Our attempts at giving substance to Christian perspectives on journalism were thus not mere private aches attended to in isolation. Unfortunately contact with the many colleges in the USA and else-

where which teaches journalism within a Christian paradigm were not explored nearly enough. However, through visits to their web-sites one could always link up with a community of like-minded scholars.

7. Conclusion

We would have preferred to agree with Combrink (2007) that retaining the notion of a Christian higher education institution can be done when it lives “in the hearts and minds of people”. But we believe the legal and philosophic framework which enabled and facilitated a more fundamental Christian approach to teaching journalism has fallen away, whether in 1996, when the private act was repealed, or when the NWU was formed – or perhaps a combination of those perceived or real, statutory and other constraints are realities which cannot be ignored and have, as indicated above, had a very real impact on what we thought were possible. Perhaps we were wrong.

This leaves the following questions which need to be interrogated repeatedly from legal, managerial and grass-roots levels: Could it be accepted that the 1996 Constitution was the prelude to the repealing of the PU for CHE’s private act?; Did this pave the way for the University’s private act to be repealed?; Did this make a fundamental change to how the PU for CHE could do its work?; What real implication did the merger (and name change) have on the content of modules? Furthermore: Did the University’s statute have any implications?; and Could it be that by aligning certain modules on all three campuses in 2010 a “generic” approach in these modules was institutionalised, thereby deleting any remaining elements of the old CHE?

These are clearly a combination of technical and practical matters. To approach it in a purely technical way may render a more positive interpretation of these and other changes. From a lower vantage point, i.e. that of lecturers faced with often conflicting demands, a more symbolic interpretation of events was natural. This led to the reaction described above.

The challenge thus remains (for those lecturers who share this vision) to find legitimate ways to inspire Christian students to accept journalism as a calling, a lifelong vocation notwithstanding institutional restraints. To this end, the opportunities provided by a value-driven approach is certainly preferable to a clinical pseudo-neutral approach, but it is not ideal at all. Perhaps those Christians with a

positive reading of the “name change” could give clearer leadership on how Christian perspectives on science (and journalism) can realistically be accommodated in the curriculum. While lecturers of the PU for CHE were at least to some extent encouraged to grow as *Christian* teachers, this has now become a purely personal issue.

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