



Persoonlike boodskappe / Personal messages

**Professor B.J. van der Walt: a very
complex and dynamic configuration
of a variety of functions centrally
religiously directed in all his actions**

R. Letšosa
Practical Theology
Potchefstroom Campus
North-West University
POTCHEFSTROOM
E-mail: rantoa.letšosa@nwu.ac.za

A man of faith

Professor Bennie (*Ramoholo*) is truly a man of faith and a God-fearer. Ramoholo (Grandfather) is the name many of the church members use when referring to him. He is one of the first members of the Kereke ya Gereformeerde Boskop which became independent around 1995. He did a lot of mission work around this congregation before and after its establishment. His contribution was especially leading Bible study sessions from which two sermon books appeared. His house remains open even now and he is never too busy or committed when it comes to issues of faith.

It is unbelievable when one looks at the volume of work under his name and he still puts in time for the work of the Lord. One can see the strength of his faith in the fact that he is always available to give a hand. In most instances when the congregation was still in possession of the kombis for the transportation of the members, it rarely happened that a Sunday would pass without one of them

having a breakdown. In extreme cases both would suffer a breakdown which implied that this Professor Bennie would have to spoil his afternoon sleep, take his bakkie and get into the job of towing the vehicles on a hot, cold or rainy Sunday afternoon. It occasionally also happened that before church services his phone would ring because some of the kombis would not start. To cut a long story short, he would then also become a mechanic before church service. This is only but one aspect of his devotion.

Despite the fact that he was directly involved at the Theological Seminary, he was notorious among almost all the black theological students, sharing his books among us, even once bought some commentaries for us. In this regard he made us humble. During Bible studies we always had our own "Bosberaad" in which we handled most issues concerning the different wards we were serving but also personalia. In a certain sense we became a very close family. We never departed from his house without some tea and biscuits. *Mamoholo* was the woman behind all this as she was always part of the Bible study and her contributions were always of great significance.

Not only was he involved in Bible study and church administration, he was, in fact, an ordained elder in the Reformed Church Boskop with only black membership and moreover in a rural area. As an elder he was also a very active missionary. He conducted services every Sunday at Teline and Mamoholo helped with the children. Their involvement at ground level meant a lot to the members. Their service did not end in church on Sundays, but became visible even during the course of the week. Once a month he would go to medical practitioners with arrangement of collecting some medication for the elderly people who could not make it during the week to the clinic or to see a doctor. Most members, including the minister, could hardly survive without him.

During church council meetings he was known for his sincerity, humility and honesty. He has a special sight for any impending danger and would always warn in advance. His advise always reflects not only his love for the Reformed Church Boskop but especially for his Master. For a number of years he also acted as secretary for the Bible study group as well as for the church council, which in fact took much of his time.

A man of people

Ramoholo and Mamoholo know many people around the globe – not only because they travelled around the world, but also because they open their doors to people irrespective of their race. Their home in some sense became a guest house run at their own expense. They not only understand, but also practice the words in Hebrews 13 that we always have to accept guests, because in so doing we might unknowingly welcome angels in our homes. The Van der Walt family can be a witness to this.

His philosophy

One thing that Professor Van der Walt hates in life is the idea of dividing a person into different sections. He emphasises the holistic viewpoint of a person. A human being, to him, is a very complex and dynamic configuration of a variety of functions centrally religiously directed in all his/her actions. This viewpoint of what a human being is, in fact is of great benefit to people in understanding their response to God and his creation. In all his writings he stresses the fact that people should not accept the status quo uncritically. They are in the world but not of the world and thus have to respond positively and not to withdraw from the world. Christians' faith should not be reserved to the church, but should grow out of the church into the world to make a difference. To sum up Professor Bennie's philosophy: one can call him the reformer of the modern era.

His family

In addition to his biological children, God blessed him with a number of other children of which I am one. My experience with him testifies to numerous things about him. Whilst Mamoholo is humble and understanding, he is honest and sincere. He makes his stand boldly and if you do not understand him you'll feel sorry for yourself. But if you do understand him, you'll love him more for he only wants the best for his children. A spade is a spade to him and that's how his children grew to know him. He is not harsh, but very gentle and very sincere. He can laugh and smile and he can be very social for he is a man of the people.

Professor Bennie as a person

Professor Van der Walt is a blessing, a kind, understanding and very approachable man. He is always busy like a bee. Resting to him appears like a waste of precious time which has to be used fruitfully.

I understand that whilst he plans to take a day of rest, once something comes to mind, he will at once wake up and jot it down. No wonder that so many books and articles saw the light under his name – he sleeps with a pen and paper next to his bed. When he walks, he is always in a hurry! I at times wonder if he ever had/has time to stroll in his life. When something comes upon his way, it soon has to get out of the way. He does not believe in postponing unnecessarily. He faithfully follows the words of Jesus in John 9:4: “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work”.

Conclusive remarks

God gave him all these beautiful gifts and still keeps him down to earth. He is now reaping part of the rewards of his hard work here on earth. In receiving some or part of the rewards now, he remains humble and does not think himself higher than other people, for he knows that he does not deserve them, it is only grace that he experiences now. He is waiting for the surprise that the King of kings has in store for him. For Hebrews 11:39-40 says: “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us! We are all looking forward to that which God has in store for us!”



Voor Bennie en Hanneltje van der Walt: herinneringen aan meer dan 40 jaren vriendschap

K.A. Bril
Amstelveen
NEDERLAND
E-pos: ka.bril@planet.nl

In 1963 kenden Bennie en ik elkaar nog niet, maar er was tussen ons al een onzichtbare band.

In dat jaar hield professor D.H. Th. Vollenhoven van de Vrije Universiteit van Amsterdam gastcolleges in Potchefstroom en Bennie was druk bezig daar aantekeningen van te maken. Dat kan ik met zekerheid zeggen want Hanneltje vond kort geleden een stapel notities terug. Ik meen bij het stofzuigen.

In hetzelfde jaar was ik leraar biologie in Noord Nederland, in Groningen en was in mijn vrije tijd bezig Vollenhoven te bestuderen. Ik maakte daarbij een index op zijn wijsgerige interpretaties van alle personen die hij in zijn artikelen behandelde. Het kaartsysteem staat hier nog.

Tijdens mijn biologiestudie in Groningen volgde ik de colleges reformatorische wijsbegeerte van prof. K.J. Popma. Popma was een heel bijzonder mens, schijnbaar chaotisch in zijn colleges en geschriften, een overtuigd en inspirerend christen. Het bleek me later dat ook Bennie geboeid was door Popma. Ik zocht naar een levens- en wereldbeschouwing als christen, ook tegen een veelal naturalistische biologie met een reductionistische mensvisie. Popma attendeerde me op het belang van de studie van Vollenhoven. Ik wilde die gebruiken bij de studie biologie. Zo verscheen, in *Philosophia reformata*, 1993:28 v., een betreffende studie. Ik begon als leraar

met een tweede studie, filosofie aan de Vrije Universiteit, vanuit Groningen.

De docenten van Bennie, Stoker en Taljaard en ook Popma stonden alle drie in relatie tot Vollenhoven. Stoker via ds. S.O. Los (1871-1944), die in relatie met Paul Kruger had gestaan sinds diens bezoek aan Nederland – zo kwam Los in contact met Zuid-Afrika. Ds. Los verwees in 1922 de 23-jarige Stoker naar Vollenhoven (J. Stellingwerff. *D.H. Th. Vollenhoven*, 1992:58 v.). En later in 1955 promoveerde Taljaard bij Vollenhoven.

Kort na 1963 trokken we beiden naar Amsterdam, naar de Vrije Universiteit. Ik werd in 1966 – door dr. Stellingwerff – als medisch bibliothecaris, hoofd van de Medische Bibliotheek van de Faculteit Geneeskunde en van het VU ziekenhuis. We kregen een woning in Amstelveen. En Bennie en Hanneltjie gingen in 1968 in Amsterdam wonen. Gezien onze achtergrond was het geen wonder dat we direct een goed contact kregen.

Bennie en Hanneltjie kwamen bij ons op bezoek en het bleek dat ze onze kinderwagen goed konden gebruiken voor hun kleine Mias. We hadden geregeld contact totdat Bennie en Hanneltjie in 1970 weer vertrokken. Nu naar de Universiteit van Fort Hare in Oos-Kaap.

Ons contact bleef bestaan en werd geregeld vernieuwd doordat Bennie naar Nederland kwam als deelnemer of spreker voor conferenties, met name van de Association for Reformational Philosophy. In die gevallen hadden we een logeerkamer ter beschikking. Die noemden we, zoals in 1 Koningen, het kamertje voor de profeet – hij is weer beschikbaar. Bennie nam voor Aukje een mooie jas mee uit het atelier van Hanneltjie. Een atelier waarin zwarte vrouwen een vak leerden en inkomen hadden. 's Ochtends in de vroege als we nog sliepen, trok Bennie zijn trainingspak aan, zijn "sweetpak", en ging hier rennen in de polder.

Na mijn promotie in de wijsbegeerte in 1986, over westerse denkstructuren, kreeg ik een verzoek van de PU vir CHO om daar het volgende jaar een reeks gastcolleges te geven, en ook te Bloemfontijn. Dat was toen tegen het uitdrukkelijke beleid van de VU. Het vertrek was kort na het overlijden van Jaap, onze oudste zoon. We konden toen ook Bennie en Hanneltjie bezoeken en onze andere goede en hartelijke studievrienden in Potchefstroom. We konden ook een dienst meemaken waarin Bennie voorging in een zwarte gemeente. Bennie liet ons de prachtige natuur in Zuid-Afrika zien. Hij trakteerde me daar op speciaal bier – vreselijk zuur. Hij had voor

Aukje een present achter zijn rug. Als je blijft – dank je Bennie: het bleek een rest achtergelaten door een ezel!

De stof voor de gastcolleges heb ik later gebruikt voor een inleiding in de probleemhistorische methode in het boek van A. Tol en Bril, *Vollenhoven als wijsgeer*. Dit gedeelte werd kortgeleden iets herzien uitgegeven als *Vollenhoven's problem-historical method: introduction and explorations*, door Dorcht College Press.

Na meer dan 40 jaren: merkwaardig, de geschiedenis herhaalt zich. Enkele jaren geleden bracht Bennie hier de geluidsopnamen van Vollenhovens gastcolleges in Potchefstroom van 1963. Ze stonden op klassieke tapes waarvan twee van 17 cm doorsnede – totaal 2 340 m. We konden nu nergens meer een apparaat vinden om deze tapes af te spelen tot de heer L. de Vries organist en geluidstechnicus ons heeft geholpen. Alle colleges zijn nu overgezet op twee CDs. Het is de bedoeling dat de tekst ook in gedrukte vorm zal verschijnen.

Vele teksten van Vollenhoven die hij schreef meer dan 30 jaar geleden zijn in 2000 en 2005 gepubliceerd door John Kok, Tony Tol en mij. Tevens heeft Bennie deze teksten gebruikt voor diverse recente verhelderende studies, o.a. voor antropologie en voor een analyse van het denken van Calvijn – ik moet me als oud-bibliothecaris beheersen om ze hier niet allemaal op te sommen. Nog steeds bestaat er een boeiend en vruchtbaar perspectief.

Ik vertelde van het kindwagentje. Onze zoon Anton heeft zelf inmiddels twee kinderen en bezocht met zijn gezin dit jaar Zuid-Afrika. Hij kon gebruik maken van de reisbeschrijvingen van Bennie vooral van zijn *Voetslaanavonture in die Drakensberge*. Ze zijn ook door Bennie en Hanneltjie gastvrij ontvangen – “kom kuier”.

We hebben nu wat psalm 90 noemt de leeftijd der sterken bereikt, we hebben beiden de laatste tijd ernstige ziekten doorgemaakt. Je zei tegen me: “We leven nu in de genadetijd”.

Moge ik eindigen met een gebed – een gebed van Mozes tegen het einde van zijn leven:

Laat Uw werk aan Uw knechten openbaar worden
en Uw heerlijkheid over hun kinderen.
En bevestig Gij het werk onzer handen over ons,
ja, het werk onzer handen, bevestig dat.



B.J. van der Walt: consummate educator

J.C. Vander Stelt
Grand Rapids
Michigan
E-mail: johnvs1@comcast.net

The first time we met was at the First International Conference, in 1975 at what is now North-West University in Potchefstroom, of the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (IAPCHE). The last time we met was earlier in 2010 at an international workshop of IAPCHE at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, USA. Both of us were beginning and aspiring teachers of philosophy and theology 35 years ago. Now since 1999 retired, we are both still, thank God, energetic and enthusiastic in our work, although a bit more realistic and somewhat wiser.

My colleague and friend in South Africa, B.J. van der Walt, is not really *retired*, but actually *refired*. What continues to motivate him in South Africa, and international circles, is his insatiable desire to think, lecture, and write about the heart-centered and mind-boggling perspective he learned as a graduate student in South Africa and in Amsterdam during those restless 1960s.

Retirement enables a person to look back, around, down, up, and ahead in a more relaxed and perceptive way. In June 2009, Van der Walt – simply known as Bennie – spent ten days with us in our home, especially in my library and office. Extensively and intensively, we reflected on our common lifelong vision and its implications for our thinking, teaching, and writing in and about our troubled, yet fascinating, world.

An excellent example of Van der Walt as philosopher, educator, writer, and occasional preacher is his long paper presented June 2010 at IAPCHE's International Workshop at Calvin College on the assigned topic. "Worldwide responses to reformed Christian higher education". That paper is typical of his familiarity with many con-

flicting philosophies, societies and cultures in our world. It also reflects his own understanding of life, the world, and history. Without oversimplifying matters, he zeroes in on the basic needs and challenges of humans everywhere and on their hope in the Anointed Savior, through the Holy Spirit's power.

For this Festschrift in B.J. van der Walt's honor, I will call attention to what I believe to be his most significant contributions. The seven distinct, and closely interrelated, insights listed below are, although religiously simple, really academically complex, educationally demanding, culturally sensitive, and historically significant.

Firstly, the relationship between revelation and philosophy, heart and head, faith and reason, chapel and education, worship and scholarship, religion and culture, church and state, and prayer and production, is not one requiring an integrating, combining, or joining of two essentially different matters. Rather, it is one in which, in each instance, the former affects the latter in an integral, intrinsic, or re-directing way. *Religion* is not some addition, something extraneous, to one's daily life at home, in society and culture. To be human is to be inherently religious in everything one does.

Secondly, given the three-fold, i.e. creational, Scriptural and incarnational nature of God's revelation, devaluating any one form of revelation undermines the two other forms of revelation. To minimize, or ignore, any part of God's revelation, sooner or later, distorts one's relation to the Creator/Redeemer, understanding of the world and history, and everyday role in society and culture. God's revelation does not permit, or sanction, any mystical view of heaven that is of no earthly good.

Thirdly, Christians must be known, first of all, for what they are for, and then as a result, secondly, for the perversions and distortions they oppose. Their primary task is to be positive, restorative, wholesome, thetical, or let the light of God's Word shine on our dark(ened) traditions, cultures and world. Those who close their eyes to the Light of the world are the ones who are actually anti-thetical. Their intentional, as well as ignorant, resistance may not intimidate, let alone silence, followers of Christ Jesus. In fact, opposition on the part of those who are really anti-thetical somehow strengthens Christians in their resolve to remain prophetic, press for renewal, and pray for those who resist God's liberating Word of life. Such childlike, yet powerful, faith in God enabled B.J. van der Walt to avoid adopting an "anti-establishment" mentality during the

restless sixties and seventies, or succumbing to the horrors of an apartheid ideology in his country, South Africa.

Fourthly, as aspiring teacher and nascent scholar, and especially as director of the IRS (Institute for Reformational Studies) at PU for CHE, involvement for almost four decades in IAPCHE, and regular contacts with colleagues and students in other parts of Africa and even the world – in all these various ways he sought to avoid misleading problems in scholarship and higher education and false dilemmas in society and culture.

He disliked any “either/or” mentality, and, at the same time, rejected a “both/and” mindset. These dead end approaches have no longevity. They are impressive at first, but soon prove to be inadequate. The solution does not lie in choosing between, for example, biblicism or scholasticism, faith or reason, rationalism or irrationalism, capitalism or socialism/communism, Western or African culture. Neither does the solution lie in combining these, and any other contrasting issues, traditions, or cultures.

Fifthly, key to B.J. van der Walt’s important role in determining IAPCHE’s goals and in implementing its program, since its beginning in 1975, has been his vision of *integrally* Christian higher education and scholarship and our local and global role in pressing for this. At the First International Conference of IAPCHE in Potchefstroom in 1975, he told me, during a conferee bus ride to the famous Voortrekkermonument, that he disagreed with the ideology of apartheid. Last June, after perusing, in our home, the very long “Broederbond membership list” printed as an Appendix in Ivor Wilkins and Hans Strydom’s *The Broederbond* (1979, New York & London: Paddington), he expressed his surprise, and sadness, about so many names of former students, colleagues, and clergymen in that list.

The most difficult international conference of IAPCHE, especially for Van der Walt and others from South Africa, was the fourth one held in Breukelen and organised by the Free University in Amsterdam and Theological University in Kampen. Some members of the South African *Broederkring*, established in opposition to the *Broederbond*, demanded that B.J. van der Walt, and several others like him – who actually were *not* members of the Broederbond – be removed from the conference and be replaced by the boycotters. Although their demand was not granted, B.J. van der Walt was saddened about the departure of the boycotters from the conference.

Sixthly, already as a graduate student, B.J. van der Walt learned from D.H. Th. Vollenhoven (and H. Dooyeweerd) at the Free University in Amsterdam about the difference between, on the one hand, radically “reformational” living and thinking and, on the other hand, the tradition of speculative probing and scholastic system-building in reformed circles, especially in philosophy and theology, and their detrimental effects on the resulting worldview.

In this regard, the person who “religiously” influenced Vollenhoven as a graduate student, pastor, and philosophy professor during the 1920s and 1930s was also the one whose way of reading Scripture and viewing created reality significantly shaped B.J. van der Walt’s perspective on life and philosophy, viz. A. Janse (1890-1960). Janse was the principal of a small elementary Christian day school in the tiny village of Biggekerke (for details about Janse, see B.J. van der Walt, *The eye is the lamp of the body: worldviews and their impact*, 2008:189-229). The down-to-earth and liberating perspective of this teacher influenced Vollenhoven’s interest in systematic philosophy and history of philosophy. The latter’s work, in turn, influenced also B.J. van der Walt’s insights into daily life, especially education and philosophy, in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa and the world.

Pivotal in his thinking and educational endeavors has been Janse’s and Vollenhoven’s rich biblical – not rigid biblicistic – meaning of “covenant”. While appreciating Calvin’s work as *reformer*, he did not like certain philosophical, notably anthropological, scholastic elements in his thinking, nor the presence of related scholastic ideas in such reformed thinkers as H. Bavinck and H.G. Stoker. B.J. van der Walt’s life resembles that of A. Janse in that both stressed the need of “walking with God” also in one’s theorising and philosophising. Important in life is not to become reputable, but to make a difference for good. This motivated B.J. van der Walt to strive for renewal in his life as philosopher and educator in South Africa and elsewhere in the world.

Seventhly, about B.J. van der Walt’s wide-ranging interests and many publications, other contributors to this Festschrift will no doubt comment. However, to me two of his publications deserve special mentioning. They are of a somewhat different nature. One of them he did not write, but only edited. It is “gift of thanks” to him, however, as Director for 25 years (1974-1999), from the IRS in Potchefstroom. In it, 26 colleagues throughout the world reflect in their articles on politics, faith life, society, and other issues in scholarship and education in the general spirit of the stance, worldview, and kind of analysis B.J. van der Walt advocated throughout his life. The title of

this IRS “a gift of thanks” (1998) to its director is, appropriately, *Signposts of God’s liberating kingdom: perspectives for the 21st century*. It is a wonderful tribute to the IRS’s director for his passion to foster a tradition of dynamic and broad reformational, not static and restricted reformed, living, thinking, educating and sharing of the Good News of God’s kingdom for, and in, our broken and hurting world.

The second publication I want to call special attention to is B.J. van der Walt’s *The enchanting world of the Drakensberg Mountains as experienced by an adventurous family* (2003; 2006; 2008; 250 pages). In an engaging way, he reflects on his experiences (and those of his wife, Hanneljie, and their four children) in the majestic Drakensberg Mountains in Kwazulu-Natal wildlife. Near the end of his interesting and practical journal, he makes a reformationally pertinent, also for philosophy and higher education, observation, one that is assumed in all of his work and writings:

Man is not a being closed off within himself. He needs to reach out beyond himself to God, or to an idol. It is a simple fact that all people are religious, whether they acknowledge it or not. All people have an innate spiritual capacity, not necessarily to serve the true God, but also many self-manufactured idols. It is not only ‘primitive’ people who have sought ultimate certainty in a hard world. The modern world abounds with idols, religions and cults of various kinds, for example, the idolization of money, sex, honour and many more. It is not even impossible to turn hiking into a cult (perepetetism)! (p. 241.)

Bennie, keep wrapping yourself in the blanket of God’s *shalom*, as you continue hiking in his world.

