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THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY, RELIGION, AND A PLURALIST PLATFORM FOR COMMUNICATION[1]

ABSTRACT

This article endeavours the optimalisation *of the discussion on* "religion, faith and the public university" by arguing for a pluralist platform for communication. Although reference to the "public" university is essential for a proper understanding of such a platform, there are concerns regarding such a concept. It is also explained how the question about the *purpose* of higher education is inextricably linked to discussion on the promotion of pluralist platforms for communication in the context of "religion, faith and the public university". Although efforts at seeking a common language in public *fora* are important, it is also important to try to include *differing* communicative forms that are especially relevant when discussing the purpose of (higher) education. It is concluded that aiming towards a pluralist platform for communication when discussing "religion, faith and the public university" is most suited towards efforts directed at the materialisation of a truly accommodative society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary scholarship in the South African context of "faith, religion and higher education" is rather scant; therefore, a conference on "faith, religion and the public university" deserves appreciation. This also provides a good opportunity to discuss starting points and related issues regarding such a topic; in other words, in presenting some insights into how to equip ourselves from the very outset to promote a pluralist paradigm when talking on "faith, religion

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and the public university" in the first place, especially against the background of the *purpose of higher education*. In other words, this article aims at providing a framework on how the conference theme itself and ensuing discussion can be enhanced. First, this is attained by briefly explaining the importance of aligning a main topic to a more specific language (and consequent understanding) according to whatever religion or faith the organisers would like to present for discussion and further development. Second, and with more emphasis than the former for purposes of this article, this investigation argues for the *enhancement of discussion* by accommodating various "languages" pertaining to interests and specific purposes when dealing with the more general theme, namely "religion, faith and the public university". In this regard, concerns are presented relating to the concept "public" to provide an awareness of how such a concept should not be understood when deliberating on a conference topic such as this one. Thus, a foundation is established for accommodating diverse languages when discussing the public university and its expected integration with religion and faith. Following on this, it is argued that the enhancement of diverse views on higher education and religion can be motivated by the question about the purpose of education, which necessitates a religious or belief connotation. Here it is also explained that discussion on the purpose of education lends itself to diverse views, as dictated by religions or beliefs. Although this article is sensitive towards balancing the search for a common language on the one hand and the need for diverse views on the other when discussing such a topic, the emphasis is placed on the latter due to the need for a specific religion (in this case, Christianity) to exercise *profession* properly and to receive *acclamation* properly. It is then concluded that such an approach to discussing religion, faith and the public university is advantageous in cultivating a vibrant plural and accommodating society.

2. PLURALIST PLATFORMS FOR COMMUNICATION

2.1   Introduction

How are pluralist platforms for discussion of religion, faith and the public university to be applied effectively? The first proposal pertaining to a starting point for developing pluralist platforms for such communication entails the alignment of a main topic to a more specific understanding according to whatever religion or belief the organisers would like to present for discussion and development. In other words, the various sub-institutions of the university such as faculties and departments should be allowed and supported to initiate platforms for discussion based on more specific main topics, for example a Faculty of Theology presenting a conference on "Christianity and the Purpose of the Public University" or a Faculty of Law presenting a conference on

"Christian Legal Scholarship". In this regard, government, society and the public university need to support the accommodation of foundational topics that are more specific and that will attract mainly those who find themselves loyal to certain religions or beliefs and who would prefer to talk on a more specific topic and in a more specific "language". However, this option would not have too high an expectation regarding the quest for a common language when discussing higher education against the background of religion or faith. Nevertheless, the inclusion of such an approach will assist in creating support for specific and strictly religious views and provide the opportunity for such views to reach fruition, something that can be expected only from a "public" institution for education. In other words, platforms for communication with more specific religious views of the public university should be accommodated to give effective expression by the relevant religion in such a debate. This also lays an added responsibility on a particular religion to initiate such discursive platforms.

The second proposal to establish a pluralist platform for communication on faith, religion and the public university effectively is to participate in a more general and accommodative topic (such as is presented at this conference), and to follow this up in terms of the importance of accommodating various "languages" regarding insights pertaining to interests and specific purposes, and not necessarily to have various groups (including various religions and beliefs) trying to placate one another by seeking a unified language or to simplify the process pragmatically.[2] This is an important point to address because of a contemporary Western society that is not hesitant in its anti-religious sentiment, which ultimately poses a threat towards accommodating different religious "languages" in the discussion on higher education and religion. This second proposal enjoys emphasis in this article, although the first proposal referred to above has much in common with the second one – by implication, this becomes clearer throughout the remainder of the article.

Reference to the "*public* university" as a concept provides good leverage to promote a higher education system that is prepared to accommodate diversity; therefore, the value of such a concept remains intact, irrespective of some concerns that may result from such a concept. Reference to "public" provides a legitimate expectation of a university that should be geared

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2   In many situations, in any event, this would be difficult to materialise due to: (i) the diversity in people's experiences and epistemic situations; (ii) the variation of "available data"; (iii) an under-determination of facts by data; (iv) the variability of people's cognitive values (evidential security, simplicity, etc.); and (v) the variation of cognitive methodology. Such factors make for a difference in the beliefs, judgments and evaluations even of otherwise "perfectly rational" people (Rescher 1993:11). Whether this prevents (or should prevent) discussants from seeking a common language and solutions is another question.

towards accommodating religions and beliefs across the board, whether in an employment, teaching or scholarly context. To think otherwise would most certainly be counterproductive towards the spirit of the Constitution of South Africa. However, in referring to the "*public* university", some concerns need to be addressed, which is done against the background of trying to promote the establishment of a pluralist platform for communication when discussing "religion, faith and the public university".

2.2   Concerns regarding "public"

Referring to the "public university" can create an understanding of "public" as seeking the subordination or even the exclusion of religious interests to benefit the process towards a culture of pragmatism and accommodation *to the extent of agreement*, while having sacrificed religious or belief specifics in the process. An example of this is a faculty that places emphasis only on the value of *professionalism* and *practical skills* instead of including a religious purpose as well. This reflects an understanding of the university as an institution whose philosophy is based on *universal* rather than *particular* cultural values (Higgs 1991:167). Reference to "public" also implies substantial governmental support and the potential of a consequent biased influence of interests that are not aligned with a pluralist dispensation in the true sense of the word. Political paradigms akin to the welfare state certainly have their risks in relation to the value monopolisation of the public sphere and consequently affect the role of the public university. In this regard, one also finds that, in many countries, the separation of church and state has progressed, while the university has grown in its relationship with the government. The reason for this is that secular scientific and scholarly knowledge is pertinent to the purposes governments have in view for their societies (Shils 1978:179-180). Consequently, this can influence discussion on the public university (to the detriment of various religions).

Then there is the implication that "public" means accommodation to the degree of restricting religion. In other words, the idea that being public does not allow the university to accommodate religion *per se*.[3] This concern stems from the popular contemporary jargon, which aligns "public" with that of the "non-

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3   In this regard, one also finds the popular view, which understands the distinction between "religion" and the "secular" as coterminous with the distinction between "private" and "public". The distinction between "religion" and "the secular" assumes that the "secular" represents an entirely neutral belief system, which is not the case, as there will always be a belief or beliefs present in any part of society. In turn, the "secular" is often connected to the "public-religious free" arena. In this regard, see Iain T. Benson 2008.

religious".[4] Also, aspiring towards accommodation (as instigated by referring to "public") runs the risk of having to draw certain boundaries; consequently, these demarcations and limits will put pressure on certain religious initiatives that will be called upon to sacrifice something in the process.[5] What comes to mind here, for example, is the hesitancy to award research funding to a specific religious research initiative in a faculty other than theology or a Christian scholarship programme in a faculty of law at a public university.

In addition, and in overlap with the latter observation, with "public" there might also be concern about what other categories of universities there might be in addition to that of "public universities". Therefore, maybe there is room for the category of "religious" or "Christian" universities and consequently a different ethos for each one, hereby *overly* bracketing, for example, values and teaching content that are uniquely Christian at "public universities". This would be true especially for a country such as the USA, where a fair number of universities are based upon a Christian ethos, and probably the same applies to many universities in Europe.[6] In this regard, Stephen Carter, in his research on the "Constitution of America and the Religious University" states that

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4   Western society has long held a distinction between the private domain as being the host of religion, and the public domain as neutral concerning religion. Western jurisprudence is also clear on the fact that when dealing with public institutions, religious interests are given a subservient status to other interests or rights. This tendency surely also has an influence on discussion on the nature of the "public university".

5   This idea was influenced by Stephen L. Carter's, *God's Name in Vain. The Wrongs and Rights of Religion in Politics,* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 166-167.

6   It is interesting to note that, in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century America, many of the contemporary popular universities had an explicitly religious ethos. However, as these universities became more open to diversity (due to society having become more plural regarding religions and beliefs), this Christian ethos deteriorated substantively. In this regard, the author would like to thank Prof. Glenn Moots (Northwood University) for his helpful comments. This is an example of how a re-structuring from a Christian ethos to attempts at integrating diversity (in other words, in becoming "public") actually (and ironically) lead to a contemporary ethos of excluding anything Christian at such universities. The same can happen in ascribing towards the importance of *public* universities in the wrong manner by which "public" is viewed as a sphere for neutrality (due to accommodation being applied from a neutralist angle) and therefore not supportive towards religion. The position is quite similar to some parts in Europe. For example, in Belgium (where there is now a plethora of various religions and beliefs), the term "public" certainly has a connotation of religious neutrality, which leads to the understanding that, because a university receives substantial financial support from the government, it is "public" and, consequently, the expectation is there that it should be neutral regarding religious affiliations. In this regard, the author wishes to thank Ms Annemie Patyn (Catholic University of Leuven) for her helpful comments.

> the religious university, like any other religious institution, can serve the important social function of … standing up for the possibility that life itself has different meanings than those the dominant culture tries to create (Carter 1998:484).

Carter's explicit exclusion of the non-religious university (by referring to the religious university), points to a loss in faith in the support of the non-religious (or public) university of other than "dominant cultures", which implies a negative stance towards the possible accommodation of the public university of other than "dominant cultures". In turn, this points to the risky business of referring to the "public university" when discussing the purpose of higher education against the background of religion, faith and the public university.

Therefore, the mentioned concerns about referring to the "*public* university" are attributable to the fact that such a reference may influence discussion of a conference theme such as this one, to such an extent that a truly pluralist platform for communication is countered. We need to be reminded that a conference at another university dealing with precisely the same topic might be met with much apathy towards religion due to the degree of liberality or anti-religiosity that may accompany such an institution (therefore, such apathy might just be promoted by relying on the term "public"). Readers who are acquainted with the South African context of higher education will surely be able to identify universities, besides the University of the Free State, where such a topic will most definitely be approached differently from the way in which we are presently doing it here – not even to mention the approach by other universities around the world. Let us not believe that all institutions of higher education, in presenting a topic such as the one at this conference, would have such a strong theological support base (and consequently such a clear understanding of the relevance of religion to higher education). Carter rightly states, "Many citizens enter into public debate on the basis of assumptions that they are unwilling to have challenged. Sometimes they win, sometimes they lose, but only if they base their assumptions on a religious understanding is their point of view entirely excluded from public dialogue. And that is a distinction that it is time to eradicate" (Carter 1989:942). This exclusion might well be the case when discussing "religion, faith and the public university" at a more liberal institution (unlike the substantially religious environment in which this conference theme is being discussed). By saying this, the risk is reiterated that, in any discussions on "religion, faith and the public university", one needs to be concerned about the mentioned risks that may accompany the concept "public" and influence such discussions to negate a truly pluralist platform for

communication pertaining to "religion, faith and higher education", especially against the background of the purpose of education.[7]

Many agree on the need for developing a mediating or common language to facilitate conversation open to all citizens (Carter 2002:4), and understandably so for promoting the popular leniency towards pluralism in society. Therefore, a topic such as is presented by this conference does provide the potential of creating pluralist communicative structures, but this needs to be applied with caution for reasons already explained and for reasons still to be explained. Surely, it is mediating language to refer to "religion, faith and the public university" as a main platform for discussion. To deal with a more general and accommodative topic, it is important to argue for the accommodating of various groups regarding their interests and specific purposes, and not, as stated before, necessarily to have various groups trying to placate one another by seeking a unified language or to simplify the process pragmatically – especially when talking about *education and its purpose*.

2.3   The purpose of the public university

The question about the *purpose* of the public university surely forms an integral part of any discussion on "religion, faith and the public university". The purpose of the public university encapsulates a primary or foundational conceptual point of departure. However, any enquiry about purpose is inextricably connected to belief (faith, religion and so forth). Benson comments that, as a point of departure, one could say that all human beings are believers. The question is not one of belief or non-belief but of what is believed *in*. Yet, according to Benson, we often hear that those who do not have religious beliefs are described as "unbelievers". All citizens, says Benson, make their decisions in life based upon their beliefs:

> On one level, therefore, we are all "believers". The separation of the world into two sharp divisions – one side (the religious in a traditional

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7   In a South African context, it might seem more tenable to refer to "public university" in the sense of accommodating religion because there are no universities with a foundational religious ethos, more specifically, a Christian support system and value ethos. This necessitates public universities in South Africa to be conducive towards Christianity due to those of Christian persuasion having no other port of call (also taking into consideration the large representation of Christianity in South Africa). In the United States of America, for example, the presence of Christian universities provides a reason for the public state-funded universities to be less conducive towards the equal placing of Christianity, because the prospective student has a choice: if he or she wants a Christian education, the universities of, for example, Notre Dame, Catholic, Brigham Young, Baylor, Boston College, Houston Baptist, Patrick Henry or Bob Jones, could be approached.

sense) thought of as based on "belief" and the other side (the non-religious) not so based, is erroneous (Benson 2008:5).[8]

We need to bear this in mind when deliberating on the purpose(s) of the public university against the background of religion and faith.

There are most certainly various degrees of difficulty regarding the quest for a pluralist platform for communication, depending on the main theme for discussion. In this regard, for example would discussions on the content of advertising billboards at the Currie Cup Final or questionable animal sacrifice ceremonies yield the same expectations for accommodating various communicative platforms than would discussions on religion and faith against the background of the purpose of higher education? Surely not. In fact, discussion on the purposes of *education* provides a more flexible theme to accommodate diverse ideas. This is where different proposals (due to the very fact of a difference in religious and faith backgrounds among learners) should allow the learner to apply religion or belief to his or her life and called-for situations in society. Sommerville rightly comments,

> Education is also a fundamentally religious enterprise. It must be built on foundations of belief, since there are no self-validating rational principles (Sommerville 2006:B7).

Education is the feeding trough of the plethora of religions, beliefs and consequent interests and values making up a pluralist society. Education, of all practices in a democratic and pluralist dispensation, must receive the least restriction possible. At the university, all the various language, belief, religious or faith "interests" must be furthered to give back to society an individual or group of individuals that can promote a flourishing pluralist society.

Learners are not to be "neutralised" during their stay at the public university. They come from certain religious or belief contexts, and the university (as conveyor of knowledge) plays a role (together with other societal structures such as churches, schools, and the family) in protecting and furthering their religious or belief characters. All education must be implemented within a basic

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8   Need we be reminded that the aims of education are not just pulled out of a hat, but are derived from more fundamental and general thinking about values? However, the question is according to what philosophy the purpose of education should be understood. This implies subscription to a certain foundational belief or religion regarding what the aim or aims of education *ought* to be. In turn, this has implications for determining what the purpose of education should be in the context of "religion, faith and the public university". This further implies that there will be various views on how one should go about talking about religion and the public university. In this regard pluralist platforms for communication (platforms referring to "religious or belief" platforms) should be accommodated in such discussions.

concept of the human being and his or her relation to the universe. Although it is not the duty of the university to inculcate any particular philosophy of life[9], it is its duty to assist its students to develop and maintain their own philosophies of life (including their religious and belief affiliations), so that they may not go out into the world maimed and useless. The university should stimulate and train students, not necessarily to think alike, but at least to think strenuously about the great issues of right and wrong (Moberly 1949:108). The university should assist in forming a mind that is aware that "the facts" that are so often appealed to, are rarely bare facts but usually include elements of interpretation, and knows that questions of meaning and value arise in all sorts of contexts in university study (Forrester-Paton 1946:17). Taylor refers to Maarten Rooy's understanding that freedom of education should be viewed in close relationship to freedom of religion. Those who wish for their children an education in harmony with the religious and moral principles they inculcate at home must be provided with the necessary facilities/opportunities (Taylor 1966:40). *This can be attained by accommodating a pluralist platform for communication, which implies the accommodation of different views, resulting from religion and faith, on what the purpose of the public university should be. Proper support for variation needs to be anchored at this primary level.*

According to Budzisewski, respect for someone else's point of view does not mean that those who are required to respect a person's point of view must necessarily accept such a point of view as true. However, by providing such respect, they do make it possible for such a person to show his or her point of view, and consequently, in the ensuing debate, all parties will honour liberty of thought and discussion (Budzisewski 1992:8).[10] In discussing the purpose of education, this is especially possible (as stated earlier) and relevant. What the

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9   Although, in many instances, the university does so indirectly, for example the liberalist influences presented to students of non-liberalist affiliation.

10   Rescher comments that "morality unquestionably calls for seeing others as entitled to their views – their disagreement from ours notwithstanding. There is a substantial, and for present purposes highly important, difference between *respecting* someone and *agreeing* with them. To respect others is to regard them as the bearers of appropriate rights and entitlements and is – as such – a requisite of benign coexistence. But due respect certainly does not require agreement. On the contrary, it requires a recognition of others as autonomous agents entitled to go their own way irrespective of our approval or disapproval, agreement or disagreement. And to respect another person as such is to do more than merely to *tolerate* them; it is to see them as units of worth and bearers of rights and entitlements in view of their shared status as rational creatures. But none of this calls for *agreeing* with them by making our ideas give way to them or by belabouring them in the interest of leading them to put their ideas into conformity with ours. Morality, in sum, calls on us to respect the views of others. But this has nothing to do with *agreement*. On the contrary, it has to do with seeing value in the

purpose of education should be against the background of the university is a theme most conducive to various points of view, because here we are dealing with primary sources of knowledge in the context of the university being a theoretical institution, not only dealing with the "what" and "how" but also the "why" and the "ought" – hereby including the conveyance of foundational truths on the metaphysical plane.

In some instances regarding discussion of the public university, a common purpose may seem attainable, thereby casting doubt on the need to allow for various more specific languages of purpose motivation. An example is Bloom's view (similar to the purpose of Plato's Academy) that the pursuit of truth, and not just any truth, forms the core of the university. According to Bloom, this means that

> there must be the pursuit of the important truth, the quest for knowledge of the first causes of things, of God, of the nature of man and his duties, of the good life in other words of the metaphysical and epistemological questions that philosophy as foundation of the sciences busies itself with (Bloom 1987:156).[11]

This is certainly not a weak proposal by which much commonality between various religions and beliefs can be reached. This should not exclude or limit a more plural reflection of various communicative platforms – more plural in the sense of being more specific and diverse in purpose motivations.

Stuntz, in reviewing a book titled *Christian Perspectives on Legal Theory*, responds with much respect for the authors of the book who were Christian law professors who took pleasure in simply being who they were, in openly writing about faith and law without feeling the need to bracket the former to mention the latter. In this regard, Stuntz states,

> Imagine telling women they must pretend they are men, or African Americans that they must think and talk white, when entering into conversations about politics or law (Stuntz 2003:1712).

Christopher Lasch observes,

> Once knowledge is equated with ideology, it is no longer necessary to argue with opponents on intellectual grounds or to enter into their point of view (Benson 2006:2).[12]

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messenger despite our disobedient views as to the correctness of the message" (Rescher 1993:18-19).

11   There are many other purposes with a universal flavour that could possibly be thought of as well.

12   How this is to be integrated into the various universities, faculties, departments or modules is not the aim of this article.

To apply this to our context, one could safely state, "Once the purpose of education is equated with ideology, it is no longer necessary to argue with opponents on intellectual grounds or to enter into their point of view". This is the attitude that we also need to bring along when debating and commenting on a theme like the one presented by this conference, albeit not necessarily the only approach.

The following further illustrates what is meant when stating that a pluralist platform for communication should include different views on the purpose of education when dealing with a more general theme: May one not be more specific about one's religious reason(s) for education, by stating that, for example, "true knowledge begins with the personal knowledge of God himself and of his Son, Jesus Christ, and of the way of salvation. True knowledge is the living knowledge of God that leads to fellowship with God and his Son, Jesus Christ. True knowledge leads to the true experience and enjoyment of the blessings of salvation that God has revealed in his Word"? One could also state that the purpose of education is to transform Christian men and women by renewing their minds after the image of Him who created them (Clark s.a.).[13] Coming from a law background, let me illustrate this further by postulating what the Christian view should be regarding the purpose of tertiary legal education. If, contrary to the demand of neutrality, God's Word demands unreserved allegiance to God and his truth in all our thought and scholarly endeavours (Bahnsen 1996:4), an emphasis on the Christian view of the law is important. Paul emphatically declares in Colossians 2:3-8, "All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Christ." In this regard, Bahnsen comments,

> Note he (Paul) says *all* wisdom and knowledge is deposited in the person of Christ – whether it be about the War of 1812, the chemical composition of water, the literature of Shakespeare, or the laws of logic! (Ibid. 1996:4).

Nolan refers to the words of the prophet Micah, stating that one must do what the Lord requires of one – only to do right and to love goodness.[14] Being a legal scholar myself, I believe that Nolan's views on the religious lawyer are most apt in this regard, namely that a religious lawyer's horizon includes concern with promoting God's plan for the world. This implies that the Christian lawyer will want to practise law with a view of God as the ultimate client (Nolan

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13   To what extent this view can be applied to teaching and scholarship will obviously differ from faculty to faculty, from department to department or from module to module.

14   Micah 6:8 reads, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Authorised King James Version).

1999:1117-1118). Therefore, this serves as an illustration of what Christian perspectives regarding the purpose of higher education could be, including a more specific example in this regard pertaining to higher education in law.

In stating this, one truly feels non-restriction in participating in discussion on the purpose of education. Why commit oneself *only* to a "general purpose"? Although it is not the aim of this article to formulate a precise Christian purpose for education (or what Christian curricula of the various sciences taught at university should look like), the mentioned examples are referred to as an illustration of how far we as participants in the overall discussion should be allowed to go individually. In other words, precisely the underlying support of a pluralist platform regarding the various purposes of higher education in the public university should dictate to the overall and unified purpose of the public university. In the same breath, it needs to be emphasised that, by this, initiatives regarding the seeking of common purposes are not excluded as well. Therefore, by no means is the exclusion of efforts at providing and applying a language of commonality implied, and by no means is the negation of practical efforts towards coming to unified solutions postulated.

Even from a Christian point of view, the latter approach is supported. In this regard, Colson comments that, when advancing the biblical perspective in public debate, the biblical truth ought to be interpreted in ways that appeal to the common good. Therefore, although we believe in Scripture as God's inerrant revelation, not all arguments have to be derived from Scripture. Colson gives the following example: When it is argued in state legislatures that criminals should be required to pay restitution to their victims, one does not say,

> "Do this because the Bible says so." Rather, the argument must be presented as sound public policy, arguing that it makes sense to give back what a person has taken, to restore what a person has destroyed (Colson 2007:134).

This necessitates a consideration of "grounds of commonality" or "consensus".[15]

With due cognisance of the preceding comment, one also needs to bear in mind Bernstein's view that a false picture is suggested when we think that our task is to leap out of our own linguistic horizon, bracket all our pre-understandings, and consequently enter into a radically different world.

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15   Smolin similarly comments that, although the problem of discourse between persons of disparate views merges as the problems of presupposition and common ground, the answer is to find some common ground, "a principle neutral in the sense that all participants will accept it as a criterion of either the true, the good, or both" (Smolin 1988:360).

Instead, the task should be to find the resources within our own horizon, linguistic practices and experience that can enable us to understand what confronts us (Bernstein 1983:173).[16] According to Carter, if the language of public debate must be non-religious, religious citizens are required to "bracket" their religious selves, leaving behind, before entering the public square, the very aspect of personality that lends meaning to their lives. The idea that religious citizens must remake themselves before joining debate might have an abstract logical appeal, but in practice, it simply represents another form of official pressure on the religious to be less than their full selves (Carter 2002:17-18). In fact, this would be in opposition to true tolerance, and in this regard Habermas states the following:

> Tolerance means that believers of one faith, of a different faith and non-believers must mutually concede one another the right to those convictions, practices and ways of living that they themselves reject. This concession must be supported by a shared basis of mutual recognition from which repugnant dissonances can be overcome. This recognition should not be confused with an appreciation of an alien culture and way of living, or of rejected convictions and practices … the basis of recognition is not the esteem for this or that characteristic of achievement, but the awareness of the fact that the other is a member of an inclusive community of citizens with equal rights (Habermas 2007).[17]

Similarly, Carter states that what is needed is not a requirement that the religiously devout choose a form of dialogue that liberalism accepts, but that liberalism accepts whatever form of dialogue a member of the public offers (Carter 1990:524). To exclude "comprehensive" religious and philosophical

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16 This can also be supported from a Scriptural point of view.

17 In similar tone, Judge Sach's comments in the South African Constitutional Court's judgment of *National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality v Minister of Justice* that "equality therefore does not imply a levelling or homogenisation of behaviour but an acknowledgment and acceptance of difference. At the very least, it affirms that difference should not be the basis of exclusion, marginalisation, stigma and punishment …" (1999(1)SA 6(CC), 67). Budzisewski provides some words of caution in this regard, stating, "True tolerance also requires each man or woman to walk the razor's edge in his relations with those in whom he finds something to disapprove. He must avoid connivance in the fault of these others, but at the same time he must avoid moral pride – a fault in itself second to none … the truly tolerant man or woman may avoid their society, but he may not parade the avoidance. He may warn others against them, but he may not do so out of malice … Though he withdraws approval toward their flaws, he does not withdraw charity toward their persons. He refuses to indulge in himself the conceit that he can examine souls; he remembers that he himself is an object of tolerance to others – especially when he is most inclined to pass judgment on them" (1992:8-9).

loyalties from the "political commons" would negate the very aims of a pluralist and modern-day constitutional political paradigm, where the different ends and goods in society should not only be towards the satisfaction of activities in the private sphere, but also in the public sphere.[18] This is especially true for discussion on education in the context of the purpose of the public university.[19]

Quite naturally, there will be factors countering the subsequent application of the various proposals and forms that would emanate from a platform conducive to differing forms of communication on education, more specifically pertaining to the representation and accommodation of religion. Examples in this regard are that (1) universities differ from one another regarding the composition of specific religious affiliations; (2) not all fields of study lend themselves substantially to religious content; (3) not all students on entering university are fully cast in a religious context; (4) the scholarly expertise and inputs pertaining to specific religions might not satisfy the demand for this by the student sector; and (5) the spectrum of religions might prove to be one too many – not to mention the threats resulting from (i) a development of a new "trans-modernist" set of values, being thoroughly postmodernist and sceptical of moral absolutes; (ii) a predominant emphasis by tertiary education on pragmatic and utilitarian goals; (iii) the emphasis of Western society on neutrality rather than the accommodation of religion; (iv) the privatisation of

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18   In similar fashion, one finds the irony that mainstream legal writers in the "civil rights" field do not perceive religious ideas and moral theories as valuable"", whereas they devote much time to commentary concerning the important role of freedom of speech in a free and democratic society – this while relatively little attention is given to the similarly important role played by freedom of religion (Destro 1987:43-44). According to Carter, it is the liberalist's fear of losing the argument that makes him revert to constructing rules of public dialogue that make it difficult (if not impossible) for the Christian to express certain positions at all. These are rules that pretend to be merely epistemic, while being rules of substance. In the words of Carter, "I call this a fear of losing the argument because we often discover, no matter how many theorists insist that free religious voices in public life will be an incoherent cacophony, that the religious voice is persuasive when other voices are not. Taylor's point is that liberals know this, and that it is that unspoken fear – the fear that resort to sacred sources might actually carry the day – that is the reason, and the only true reason, for the effort to keep the sacred sources out" (Carter 2000:110). This is mentioned due to the domination of liberalism and its consequent threat to the accommodation of variety when discussing "religion, faith and the public university".
19   This is also due (as mentioned earlier) to the unique characteristics of education from a university perspective and its purpose when compared to more complex issues (as illustrated earlier).

religion; (v) the distance between church and state; and (vi) an over-emphasis on commercial and material interests.

However, this should not negate the importance of endeavouring towards a platform conducive to a pluralist accommodation of various forms of communication *as well*, when deliberating on the purpose of the public university. Not doing so will run the risk of separating religion from higher education; consequently, the public university would be mandated to serve as a non-religious force in education. In other words, there will not be proper representation of various beliefs. The "purpose and nature of the public university" must be given an "open" connotation, meaning that it needs to allow for foundational forms of communication from all over to be considered and hopefully applied, including that of the religious.

3. CONCLUSION

In *also* endeavouring the accommodation of a plurality of communicative foundational platforms when deliberating on "religion, faith and the public university" (which implies deliberation on the purpose of education), a substantial step towards the realisation of a vibrant plurality of beliefs akin to especially an effective participatory and pluralist democracy will be taken. Also, in understanding the public university against the background of faith, religion and the purpose of education in a way that provides pluralist platforms for communication in the manner explained in this article, would be to give proper acclaim and relevance to the concept of "public" in "public university". This is most relevant towards cultivating a healthy and vibrant plural society. If the role of the university should include various purposes aligned to and motivated by various religions and beliefs, this implies the transference of a substantial amount of metaphysical belief or religious knowledge. The importance in this regard is that such knowledge assists the promotion of the diverse building blocks of interests and communication in society (as well as the development of the learner's cosmology as briefly referred to earlier). In this regard, the university, together with other societal structures that also educate, such as the church, schools, media and the family, has an important role to play, notwithstanding the fact that there are differences in emphasis between the mentioned institutions regarding the specialised content of metaphysical belief or religious knowledge that is to be taught or researched. However, this does not exclude the one from having absolutely no overlap with the other. Religious and faith affiliations are inextricably connected to the domain of this overlap. In other words, teaching the religious can resort both under the university as well as under the church, although this does not entail a substantial overlap. Surely, including religion or belief in the curriculum feeds what Everett calls the "private spheres" that already have a public dynamic that

constitutes them – they are already diminutive publics to the degree that they sustain the processes of *profession* and *confirmation*. These "private spheres" are reflected in the individual as well as groups of individuals sharing similar interests. As "little publics", they have public demands and exist as public institutions, performing indispensable and unique public functions (Everett 1988:157). This can be effective only once we are free to connect our faith, religion or belief to discussion on higher education and its purpose, bearing in mind that diverse points of views on higher education and its purposes need not agree with one another.

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