

Civic Engagement, Belief and the Scholarly Aspect in Higher Education

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Samevatting

'n Problematiese ontwikkeling in kontemporêre hoër onderwys, is die lojaliteit van laasgenoemde met betrekking tot die pragmatiese en materiële. Dit het 'n invloed op die toepassing van burgerbetrokkenheid, synde een van die hoofsteunpilare (benewens onderrig en navorsing) van die missie van die universiteit te wees. Die verwagting bestaan dat burgerbetrokkenheid hoofsaaklik sosio-ekonomiese en tegnologiese rolle moet vervul, wat gevolglik afbreuk doen aan die primêre rol van die universiteit as 'n plek van (vak)kundigheid in en aan die gemeenskap. Met ander woorde, teorie en geloof, en daarom (vak)kundigheid, word verswak deur die universiteit se strewe om die samelewing in slegs 'n materiële sin op te hef. Burgerbetrokkenheid het ook 'n taak wat betref die verryking van individue en belangegroepes vanuit 'n transendentale konteks. Die universiteit het daarom 'n rol te vervul in die onderrig van die burgerlike samelewing in geloofs- en teoretiese kwessies, wat ook deel van sy missie van burgerbetrokkenheid moet vorm. Dit sal ook die relevansie van godsdiens noodsaak, en gevolglik die kerke (as 'n belangrike faset van die burgerlike samelewing) met betrekking tot die universiteit se burgerbetrokkenheid-verantwoordelikheid.

1. Introduction

In reading about the concept of civic engagement¹ in the context of higher education, one comes to realise the general absence of contributions

1 Also referred to as “community service”, “civic responsibility” or “community engagement”.

relating to faith and theory. In other words, civic engagement, with specific emphasis on the faith and theoretical aspect, is generally lacking in contemporary debate on the nature of civic engagement in the context of the university. Faith and theory are inextricably linked to form an essential facet of the university's relationship not only regarding teaching and research but also directly related to society. Faith and theory combine to form an important part of scholarship, the latter being the university's primary goal. This understanding seems to have been overlooked, constituting a serious flaw, bearing in mind the close relationship between the concept of civic engagement and related concepts such as scholarship, theory, faith, the university, democracy, religion, communitarianism, republicanism and civil society. It is especially the faith aspect that is explained first, in order to understand the proposal regarding the application of the theoretical paradigm of civic engagement. Theory rests on presuppositional points of departure, which consequently include faith and religious (hereby understood traditional faiths) utterances in academic activities. In this manner the scholarly aspect of the university is upheld. This is especially true for the social sciences, with their susceptibility to ideological interpretation. In fact, it is this very problematic nature of the social sciences that has excluded the accommodation of faith aspects in the university, and this has also influenced the form that civic engagement should have.

According to Benson, people often make the mistake of assuming that only religious people have faith (that is, they trust things that they do not or cannot empirically prove to themselves in the manner in which they live). Benson explains that a scientist trusting in the accuracy of his or her instruments and observations relies upon faith just as much (although in a different sense) as the person trusting that the sidewalk he or she walks upon is actually there; that the world around them will perform in predictable ways; that the sun will rise tomorrow; or that they will continue to live beyond the moment so as to undertake projects of a variety of sorts (including experiments). Religious people just have a different basis for describing what (or whom) they believe and trust in than do those who operate with a less developed theory based on "natural faith" (Benson, 2007). Basic values, perspectives, and presuppositions underlie all knowledge and all social theories and programmes. These 'worldviews' may be clearly religious in a traditional sense or they may be non-theistic or secular in nature: in either case they are 'religious' in the sense of being non-empirical givens that condition one's intellectual theories and practices, as well as approaches to complex social welfare needs, and other such activities – in other words, 'faith' forms the

foundation of all scholarly activity, and this includes the university and consequently its main functions and responsibilities (Monsma, 1996:119). From this one may conclude that theory is inextricably linked to the ‘faith’ aspect.

Bearing in mind that the strong theoretical aspect pertaining to the university is inextricably linked to faith (and consequently scholarship), this article argues for the implementation of the fusion of faith and theory not only internally regarding the university environment, but also in its external relationships and obligations to interest groups in the community (as reflected in the concept of civil society) against the background of civic engagement. Duderstadt states that public service is the extension of the research, teaching, and professional expertise of the faculty (Duderstadt, 2000:133). Public service is reflective of civic engagement, the latter being representative of the other core functions of the university, namely research, teaching and professional expertise. However, the nature of the research, teaching and professional expertise aspect to be extended into civil society and the rest of the public sphere, needs to be scrutinised – scrutinised in the sense of what the foundational contributions of these aspects should be, for example, pragmatism, materialism, morality, ethics and religion. Therefore, what should the parameters of this extension be? On reading Duderstadt’s *A university for the 21st century*, it is evident that his view on this extension is limited to the tangible. But should this be the case – is there not more to this? Duderstadt also comments that education and scholarship are the primary functions of a university – its primary contribution to society. On the other hand, the public supports the university, contributes to its finances and grants it a universal degree of institutional autonomy and freedom. This is done in part because of the expectation that the university will contribute not just graduates and scholarship, but also to the addressing of social needs and concerns (Duderstadt, 2000:146). Providing insight into what these social needs and concerns precisely are, is the purpose of this article, with special reference to what should be understood regarding the parameters of civic engagement against the background of the university as founded upon the development of scholarship.

2. The university, truth and the metaphysical

In South Africa, higher education is making a concerted effort at integrating civic engagement within the core functions of the university. This is due to demands for social upliftment which have provided the university with a new challenge and much required playing field in the

form of civic engagement. This is happening at such a pace that theoretical debate on the concept of civic engagement itself, has been rather neglected. Visagie mentions a lacuna regarding critical-analytical discussions of the trends and even of the whole concept of community service (civic engagement) (Visagie, 2005:226).

The university has truly become the ‘multiversity’, the latter to be understood in an idealistic and pragmatic sense. According to Visagie, the doors of the ‘ivory tower’ have been known to open to consultation with all kinds of social entities and professions, and that “not only have the doors swung open to those on the ‘outside’, but through those same doors university teachers have ‘gone out’ into the community, establishing professional practices and services of various sorts” (Visagie, 2005:224). Visagie speaks of the ideological ‘colonisation’ of the university which takes place when the central knowledge enterprise at the heart of the institution becomes dominated, at various points, by sets of mutually entangled norms and goals: which happens, for example, where the goals of techno-economic progress in society begin to dictate what goes on in the offices, classrooms, laboratories and meeting halls of the university. This touches on Bloom’s warning that the university must guard against compromising its original purpose in the desire to be more useful, more relevant, more popular (Bloom, 1987:254) – a warning that, although given many years ago, is especially apt for the contemporary situation regarding the university and civic engagement. According to Bloom, academic freedom has become assimilated to the economic system, and the increased demands made on it by society, the enormous expansion of higher education, have combined to obscure what is most important about the university (Bloom, 1987:260). Poverty alleviation, technology, medicine and economics normally dominate discussion regarding the role of higher education for society. The university is expanding in its priorities, and is in the process of becoming a ‘multiversity’ in terms of its priorities and functions. Not only should this expansion be understood as implying an increase in options regarding subjects to enrol for and careers to choose from, but also in the sense that the university has evolved regarding its *direct* relationship with and assistance to society. This expansion is not necessarily a negative development or aspiration. The concern however is whether certain priorities become negated in the process. The question regarding the nature of the university especially pertains to the question as to how far it is desirable that the university should only comply with the so-called social (and material) demand of

society.² The question to be asked is whether the university's civic responsibility can include upliftment in the sense of the metaphysical, hereby providing sensitivity towards the inclusion of the mutualistic relationship between belief and theoretical aspects.

It may be true that the idea of the university is influenced by the fact that conceptions of education are always constituted by diverse intellectual, political and ideological traditions that speak to different visions of the good life and the good society (Carr & , 1996:181). However, the university is a concept, and concepts frequently retain identity via core elements. In this regard, the *theoretical* and *scholarship* aspects are inextricably linked to a popular understanding of the university. This implies inclusion of the faith aspect to scholarship as well. However, what precisely is meant by *theoretical* and *scholarship* is not always that clear. In this regard, an investigation as to the true nature of the university should provide more lucidity in understanding core educational concepts such as theory and scholarship. Bloom sheds more light on what the true nature of the university should be by proclaiming that the pursuit of truth, and not just any truth, forms the core of the university. However, in the words of Bloom:

The pursuit of truth is not a sufficient definition of the university's goal; General Electric and Sharpe & Dohme are interested in truth too. It 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 (Bloom, 1978:156).

The Enlightenment contributed towards the manifestation of the idea that secularism is based on rationality, as opposed to the irrationality of religion – “thus it is said that religious reasons for action are irrational, and that a modern democratic state can exist without recourse to faith” (Ekins, 2005:2-3).³ Delanty states that as the age of liberal modernity drew to a close in the early decades of the twentieth century, the university became absorbed into industrial society. In these decades the following cognitive structures, that were to prevail throughout the twentieth century, emerged namely, the separation of facts and values, reason and faith, intellectuals and experts, the unity of nation and state, tradition and modernity

2 See Leszek Kolakowski, “What are universities for?”, 27-33, in: *The idea of the university*, Jerzy Brzeziński and Leszek Nowak, Posna? Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities, Vol. 50, 1997), 27.

3 Also see John Kleinig, *Philosophical issues in education*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 257.

(Delanty, 2001:42). Consequently, these prevailing cognitive structures have influenced an understanding of the concept of civic engagement. In addition, postmodernism, the moral vacuum left by academic relativism and neutrality, individualism, as well the prioritisation of the commercial world, have ignored the importance of faith and theory as an activity of seeking fundamental truths. This has influenced an understanding of the university as a scholarly institution endeavouring to find answers to fundamental metaphysical questions, which also has implications regarding the civic responsibility-function of the university.

According to Delanty, the current situation of the university reflects the contemporary condition of knowledge. In this regard, an important aspect is the penetration of communication into the heart of the epistemic structure of society precisely at a time when this is also happening to democracy, for both knowledge and democracy are being transformed by communication. This is in contrast to the age of modernity, where the university as institution of knowledge existed in a space outside the flow of communication – “knowledge has been seen as a site, a place, that can be occupied by something called a university”. In this conception, knowledge was located in the university, not in society (Delanty, 2001:1-2). Bearing in mind the university’s contemporary presence and relevance to knowledge and communication external to itself, it is of fundamental importance to relate this positioning of the university to its exercise of civic engagement.

Sullivan comments that higher education should not merely be limited to knowledge-producing service-providers but should be, amongst other things, ‘critics of values’ (Sullivan, 2000:35). According to Bloom, the deepest intellectual weakness of democracy is its lack of taste or gift for the theoretical life. The great European universities used to act as our intellectual conscience (with the churches also playing an important role), and following their decline, we are left to our own, with nothing preventing us from thinking too well of ourselves (Bloom, 1987:252). In the words of Benson: “The university should be a watchtower over the surrounding culture to note and analyze the happenings in that culture and sound warnings based upon that analysis. Instead, they are sometimes described somewhat pejoratively as ‘ivory towers’ – beautiful, expensive and largely useless” (Benson, 2007). This negative stigmatisation of the university as an ‘ivory tower’ could to a large extent be symptomatic of the university’s neglect of civic participation from a theoretical point of view as well – in addition to having an unbalanced emphasis on material and socio-economic ends.

The university as 'intellectual conscience' is limited not only to the pursuit of truth and virtue *internally*, but also in its relationships with the rest of civil society (clusters of interests) and government. The university forms an integral part of the conscience of the community and various groups within the community (such as the churches, cultural and language associations, as well as charitable institutions) have a role beyond assisting in power transference in the sense of exclusively material support. Power without the virtue of wisdom in a modern and civilised world reflects a contradiction. Wisdom does not always have to have a consensual basis: the important aspect is the presence of wisdom (in its various forms) alongside material prosperity. In other words, the university, as part of the community's conscience, needs to serve the interests of the community (as represented by various interest groups) regarding the various branches of such wisdom. Goodlad states that however much one may value the specialised nature of the university's work, it is still necessary for the individual who works in the university to have some conception of the social relevance of his activity, to have a motive for being there at all. According to Goodlad, this may best be achieved through some *direct involvement with community problems* (Goodlad, 1975:23-24), the latter not necessarily only pertaining to material problems but, for example, problems regarding theoretical, moral and/or religious issues as well – in other words issues pertaining to faith. The proud academic representative of the university is a reflection of such wisdom and conscience, and can effectively assist in any 'transmaterial' problems that may arise in society regarding an issue related to such an academic's expertise. This should also be accomplished via the medium of civic engagement.

The university as theoretical institution in pursuit of truth, wisdom, and virtue is becoming a nursery for the cultivation of pragmatism, as well as commercial and technological progress. This development is supported by the university's moral mandate regarding civic engagement in the context of *only* material upliftment of the community, and in the process, sight is lost of the university's contribution regarding theoretical upliftment of a pluralistic society with pluralistic ideologies. Schuurman speaks of the technological control mentality giving rise to the desire to strengthen man's freedom by means of scientific-technological command. Implicated in this approach is the exclusion of questions related to spiritual reflection and religious, ethical or ideological problems. Consequently, culture is wholly saturated by the technological mentality (Schuurman, 2006:160), with effectiveness, efficiency, and maximum profit as values in and of themselves (Schuurman, 2006:161). Heisenberg states:

With the seeming limitless expansion of material power man has arrived in a situation of a captain whose ship was so well constructed from steel and iron that the needle of his compass reacted only on the iron mass of the ship and no longer pointed to the North. With such a ship the correct direction can no longer be established, it simply circles around or is at the mercy of wind and currents (Schuurman, 2006:162).

Regarding Heisenberg's metaphor of the ship, Schuurman comments that if the captain desires to sail in the right direction once more, he will have to orientate himself by using the stars, and therefore the technological culture will again have to be considered with reference to viewpoints from outside technology (Schuurman, 2006:163). The material well-being of the members and institutions of society is not sufficient, if such well-being is without a 'deeper' purpose. This 'deeper' purpose is a factor in distinguishing man from all the other creatures. In this regard the university has an important role to play in informing society also from a deeply theoretical, religious and moral foundation. The absence of support in this regard, whatever the moral or religious type, could result in a disorientated civil society with no sense of higher calling or foundational loyalties.

Fourie mentions that it remains true that the greatest service to society of a university is to be a place of excellent scholarship (Fourie, 2004:3). Higher education's primary task is the preserving, generating, and transmitting of knowledge, tasks that are represented by scholarship (Brukardt et al., 2006:16). This implicates theoretical, transcendental, moral and religious questions (in other words, questions of faith), as well, both in a teaching, research, professional expertise and a civic engagement culture. Fourie speaks of the concept of 'integrated community service', and adds that a key principle of integration is that whatever is done in terms of civic engagement, must be entrenched in the unique and intrinsic nature of a university as a place of scholarship. In this regard, activities related to community service should not therefore be viewed as separate from the university's core activities (Fourie, 2004:2). Therefore, seeking fundamental truths, which includes 'faith issues', needs to be accommodated. In a developing society such as South Africa, where there are so many material needs and so few institutional and other resources, institutions such as universities do have a larger responsibility to broaden their scope and their focus to support the socio-economic development of society (Fourie, 2004:3). This places the emphasis on civic engagement as understood in a material and technological sense. However, this should not negate the relevance of themes that transcend materialism and technology, which is in line with a proper conception of an integrated civic

engagement in line with the university's core activity of scholarship in the sense of propagating and scrutinising foundational metaphysical truths. Political liberalism and democratic upliftment will also be served as a result.

One example of civic engagement in a pre-factual context is, for instance, where a member or members of a secular university's law school envisage a scholarship programme specifically aimed at the teaching of a Christian-orientated jurisprudence, not only to students but also to lawyers, church representatives, and members of other relevant professions. In no manner should this imply the dissemination of a Christian jurisprudence that teaches a defence against secular influences based on undiplomatic or coercive tactics, rather that such knowledge is accompanied by a large section of the teaching of rational discourse to be applied in the communicative processes in a pluralistic public sphere. In fact, rationality is only one of the principles that could be considered. This means that a Christian doctrine does not have to be subordinated in all instances to that which is rational. The same applies to any belief for that matter. It is precisely in such initiatives that a wide spectrum of the community can participate (theologians, lawyers, doctors, politicians etc.), in which the fundamentals of not only the normative dimension can be disseminated but also vital issues such as constitutionalism, democracy, political liberalism, communitarianism, and republicanism – vital issues in support of civic engagement understood also in a civic engagement context. The university should support such initiatives especially where there is substantial interest and representation. Another example would be the initiation of informative and communicative structures in the community on the jurisprudential/ethical issues related, for example, to the protection of the unborn. Not only would this provide public participation and deliberation based on constructive, rationalistic discussion, it would also serve as enrichment to those members of civil society who ascribe to the same or similar beliefs and values. This could involve a project in partnership with the various church/ religious denominations in society, possibly also having the potential for a law school to engage with the churches regarding relevant issues related to freedom of religion and a public-oriented ethic. One could extend this to public lectures on the Creationist versus Evolutionist views, which could be an important contribution by the scholarly element of a university in order to inform society and interest groups on the various perspectives regarding foundational insights on man and the world.

Academic expertise could also establish a community project aimed at health care, where, based on certain ethical or religious points of departure, healthcare workers who may be interested, could be taught how to approach certain problematic areas of application in their work, such as abortion. In this regard, the university could also play a role in safeguarding possible religious sensitivities that may arise, thus playing an important role in protecting the conscience of the individual. Such information enriches the individual and consequently provides him or her with an added sense of purpose in life, and/ or with a more informed view on reality. In the same manner lectures could be provided by the university to the broader public on issues pertaining to euthanasia, same-sex marriages, and so forth. With the high crime rate and the HIV/ AIDS problem in South Africa, much effort is made at limiting these socially debilitating issues, but mostly from a practical point of view. However, besides the sparse media releases regarding efforts towards moral regeneration in the fight against crime and disease, not much is done regarding moral and religious solutions to the ailments of society. Here the university should provide a civic engagement service led by moral and theological expertise as well. Approaches to societal problems such as crime, disease and poverty have many avenues, some of these essentially being understood from a faith or religious perspective.

Bearing the above in mind, the university has an important role to play in providing the necessary expertise towards the countering of social problems. The effective application of this expertise also needs to be understood in the context of civic engagement as including 'pre-factual' engagement. On inspection of the whole range of themes, especially in the social sciences, the possibilities of the university's civic engagement responsibilities from a theoretical and faith-based angle becomes not only more convincing but also endless. Schools, churches, legislatures, political parties, hospitals, and unions all have interests and a need for assistance beyond (but not excluding) the material. It would be unwise to deal with issues such as AIDS, euthanasia, abortion, reproductive rights, polygamous or same-sex marriages, only from a material, pragmatic and 'neutral' stance.

It is important to understand the above by scrutinising the relationship between teaching, research, and civic engagement as core elements of the university's functions and responsibilities. There may be a margin of overlap between these core concepts, where, for example, certain civic engagement activities could qualify as teaching as well. An example would be an argument stating that a scholarship programme aimed at

teaching Christian law students the basics of a Christian jurisprudence (as discussed earlier) could perhaps be viewed as part of the teaching element of the university, instead of forming part of the university's civic engagement component. However, this is not necessarily the case, bearing in mind the university's encompassing responsibility regarding the development and distribution of scholarship in all of its forms/activities. In fact, in many contemporary types of civic engagement there is a large facet of teaching involved in any case. Coming back to the mentioned scholarship programme, it may be argued that civic engagement also assists the development and distribution of scholarship. In addition, it may be argued that such a scholarship programme would not form part of the core teaching responsibilities of the university due to its informal and charitable character. Also, the possibility of having such scholarship programmes would increase due to assistance from the university's civic engagement department, where otherwise there would be nowhere to apply for funding within the university's internal funds. Assistance in this regard does not necessarily mean that the university would have to allocate large sums of funding to cover all the aspects of such a programme, just as long as some assistance is given. Excluding this possibility would negate the scholarly role of the university towards civil society, and consequently limit civic engagement to pragmatic and material solutions. This cannot be healthy for a democracy and pluralistic society such as South Africa.

3. Civic engagement, civil society, and democracy

Ehrlich proposes that civic engagement implies “(w)orking to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference” (Ehrlich, 2000:vi). One needs to bear in mind that the concept of ‘community’ is a flexible one and therefore must first be clarified within a specific argument or discussion. In the context of this article, community can imply ‘communities of interest’⁴, consequently implying not only material interests but ethical, moral, and/ or religious interests as well. Community service in the latter context therefore has application beyond material upliftment. The university as institution which normally

4 See John Annette, “Community, service learning and higher education in the UK”, 51-64, in *Citizenship and higher education. The role of the university in communities and society*, James Arthur (Ed.), (London & New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2005), 53 for this understanding of “community”.

finds substantial financial support from the government, also needs to reflect the tax-payer's interests, and part of this includes the cultural, religious and moral preferences of individuals and interest groups in society. This implicates important concepts such as *democracy*, *public participation* and *pluralism*. The university should also not only be understood as part of civil society (groups of interests) but also as representative of various segments of civil society. The university should not be owned by a specific ideological monopoly which excludes other ideologies or interests. This understanding should be of special importance due to the integral role that a university plays in educating the community. Education plays an important role in establishing and developing the individual's foundational life perspectives, and the university together with pre-tertiary education, needs to be approached with the necessary inclusivity and sensitivity in this regard.

In order to understand the true role of civic engagement, one needs to refer to important concepts such as *religion*, *democracy*, *public participation*, *pluralism* and *republicanism*. A pluralist society rests upon a process of communication. It aims at consensus, and it sustains and defends itself by argument. In a pluralist society, religion, as a set of particular beliefs and norms, offers a rich contribution to the public debate – a contribution that is subject to correction and development but is unsurpassed, nonetheless, in its scope and depth (Davis, 1994:126). This is explained as follows: Religion is to be understood as a belief in something which has the status of not depending on anything else (Clouser, 1991:21-22), in other words, a faith or belief in a first-principle applied, as a primary point of authority, by the believer in his or her ontological quest. This also includes the believer's view on reality, truth and what he or she perceives to be right and wrong. Therefore, religion plays an important role in the formulation of theories, the latter understood as consisting essentially of hypotheses (and not facts) intended to explain something, such explanation prompted by the quest to find the answer to some question which is not *directly* discoverable. Religion understood in the above context implies that *any* normative content will always be traced back to a belief in a primary, axiomatic and transcendental point of authority, beyond which point no further justification can be sought. Belief in religion in this context, therefore, does not include only the 'traditional' religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam, but also the secular ones, such as humanism and atheism, amongst others. Secular approaches also include unchallengeable commitments born of faith, as well as extra-rational appeals to transcendent authority.

Religion, while no longer a structural principle, is still a social factor (Davis, 1994:46). Habermas views the public sphere as essentially the place where ‘public opinion’ is formed by the conversation and debate of an engaged citizenry. The public sphere is a realm of social life where matters of general interest can be discussed, where differences of opinion can be settled by rational argument (Forrester, 1997:22-23). This emphasises the non-material aspect of the community. The relevance of the university in this regard is clear: the university has the societal responsibility to inform this public opinion in all its various forms and content of expression – material and transcendental. The modern-day university should also contribute to modern views on republicanism regarding the pursuance of goods or ends. In other words the university has an important role to play in the determination, cultivation, maintenance, development and protection not only of discussion and of rational communication, but also of that which is good or of interest to individuals and groups of individuals in society. The university needs to be constructive towards the spectrum of purposes or ends of these individuals and groups of individuals as well. The goods and ends of individuals and groups of individuals are not only satisfied by material contributions, but also by theoretical and faith aspects. Just as all sciences have transcendental aspects so do all people and associations of people. The degree of transcendental priority and demand may vary from society to society, or from individual to individual, or from group to group. An influencing factor could be economic circumstances, for instance, where the faith aspect might be subordinated to the need for access to basic socio-economic rights. However, fact remains that the faith aspect is inherent to all of man and that the university should play a role in enriching society in this regard, not only through teaching and research, but also through civic engagement (which of course could include teaching and research aspects, although not in a prioritised sense).

Maynor provides relevant insights on the modern-day view that republicanism should have, which in turn has relevance to the civic engagement responsibilities of the university. According to Maynor, the neo-Roman model of republicanism involves the maintenance and development of interest groups within society, by way of public participation regulated by a strong legal and institutional system. The neo-Roman version of Republicanism focuses on creating the institutional arrangements that preserve individual freedom, and emphasises the need for strong laws and institutions that secure civic-minded individuals and leave them to pursue their chosen ends (Maynor, 2003:13). In addition this approach views the world as consisting of competing dispositions that

individuals wish to pursue (Maynor, 2003:12). The neo-Roman models leave such final questions more open-ended while stressing the processes and constitutional arrangements that guarantee individuals a degree of personal freedom (Maynor, 2003:13). The university, and consequently its civic engagement responsibilities, becomes most relevant in this regard. It is an imperative that the university should also play a role in feeding, developing, informing and enriching discussion and rational communication and, in accordance with the pursuance of neo-Roman republicanism, informing individuals and various interest groups in society with knowledge in a faith and theoretical context as well. The university serves as a critical mass of knowledge comprised of a diversity of values and interpretations of concepts, in addition to facts and pragmatic expertise. This should be utilised optimally, and the university's civic engagement obligations need to be prioritised in this regard as well (in addition to the prioritisation of teaching and research). All three pillars of the university, namely teaching, research and civic engagement, should include the faith aspect – missing out on this in any of these pillars will negate not only the essential calling of the university, but also will be contrary to a democratic, pluralist and republican society, consequently resulting in the domination of a specific cosmological and epistemological paradigm.

Botha refers to the constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion, freedom of expression and the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities as media for the facilitation of public participation in political discourse. Not only legislatures, courts and administrative agencies, but also extra-governmental social institutions all provide opportunities for political participation and deliberation about the common good, bearing in mind that the common good may not be deified. The common good is in fact the accommodation of all the ends and goods of the various interest groups in society, and these ends and goods are not only material or tangible. It is in this manner that civic republicanism celebrates human difference, requiring a willingness to subject one's own assumptions to critical scrutiny, and to see the world through the eyes of another (Botha, 2000:28-29). There is no inherent guarantee that the decisions of representative bodies will be superior, more responsible or more reasonable than the micro-decisions of enlightened individual actors. In fact, most of the new issues and problems concerning the 'common good' have been brought to light during the 1970's and 1980's by new social movements working outside the formally constituted political system (Offe & Preuss, 1991:165). The university's civic engagement function has a role to play in this regard. In the words of Offe and Preuss:

... the role of actors within civil society, both collective and individual, assumes increasing strategic significance for the solution of societal problems. As justice is no longer something that can be implemented through legislation alone, the rule of law must be complemented at the micro-level of the principled action of conscientious citizens (Offe & Preuss, 1991:165).

Justice includes a sense of what is or should be right and wrong. Whether individuals or groups of individuals have different views of right and wrong is not the issue: the issue is that civil society is an important medium for the vindication and communication of rights and wrongs, hereby assisting in the determination and application of justice. Within a constitutional state, there can be no threat in this regard, due to there being an independent judiciary guarded by fundamental and universal principles and values. Based on the understanding that civil society is where opinions are expressed and refined (from a professional and specialised perspective) and where views are exchanged and agreements made, the inference could be drawn that the university forms part of civil society (De Freitas, 2005:27). Therefore, the university, as part of civil society, has a role to play in the progression, nurturing and communication of views of right and wrong, and in the solving of societal problems, the latter not only restricted to the material but also including the transcendental. This should also be accomplished by the university's civic engagement policies.

In 1940, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of American Colleges (AAC) issued a joint 'Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure' stating in its first paragraph: "Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest either of the individual teacher or the institution as whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition". Bearing this in mind, Wergin states that more than this is asked of the academy these days. Wergin adds that the general public is seeking greater engagement with social issues on the part of the academy, proposing that the AAUP/ AAC statement needs a codicil stating: "Academic freedom characterized by the 'free search for truth and its free exposition' will serve the common good as long as communities beyond the academy are involved in defining the goals of the search and are active participants in it" (Wergin, 2006:36). In order to assist in this process the university must assist society in being theoretically, religiously and morally informed as well. Is it not precisely now, when knowledge and the yearning for knowledge at the micro-level is at its greatest, that the role of the university's civic engagement function in a theoretical sense, is to enjoy more emphasis and be most fruitfully utilised? Messner explains that:

Assuredly it is not immediately through the state that the dynamic of natural law and the progress of moral consciousness become effective, but rather through the endeavours of the great ethical and political thinkers and through social and political movements and their influence (Cristini, 2007:5).

In this regard, the university, as an important societal and intellectual institution in addition to similar structures such as social and political movements, has an important role to play in assisting the development, integration, and debate on moral consciousness. For a society with a strong religious segment, this implies expertise from the university, among other things, to assist in religious perceptions of the good. Here faith takes on a more specific form which necessitates proportional attention. It is important to note that citizens are not disrespected when their fellows advance political arguments on grounds that they find inaccessible, as long as efforts are taken to express the arguments civilly and to render them intelligible (Ekins, 2005:6). In political discourse, disagreement extends to axiomatic premises, and this is something to be accepted and included. There is no such thing as neutral premises, as long as there is diplomatic and rational discussion continuously aiming at peaceful consensus and/or solution(s), even though such consensus or solution(s) may not always be attained. Whatever the end result, the fact remains that sacrifices on the part of some faiths to the advantage of other faiths will take place. However, a model that accommodates as many interest groups as possible, while simultaneously maintaining a peaceful and interactive environment where both the material and theoretical aspects are reasonably and civilly presented, will result in fewer sacrifices than will be the case with other models. According to Fergusson, no polity can remain neutral in respect of the goods it values and promotes through the passing of laws. Thicker notions of the good are necessary to the formation of substantive policies in fields such as broadcasting, sex education, pornography, Sunday trading, advertising standards, asylum seekers and abortion (Fergusson, 2004:78). Not everyone believes that: same-sex marriages are right; morality and the law are separate; the ‘foetus’ is not human; euthanasia should be legalised; religion and the law are separate; the aim of the law is merely for the betterment of society (without any further moral or religious aim); the law is aimed at pragmatic ends; there must be an instrumental approach to law and lawyering; there must be a ‘tough-minded’ and analytical attitude toward legal tasks and professional roles; freedom of expression justifies trade in pornography; rehabilitation is superior to punishment in penological theorising; and that there must be an absolute faith that man, by the application of his reason

and the use of democratic processes, can make the world a better place (Fergusson, 2004:78) (in contrast to faith in God, for example, and His will for mankind).

Considering the nature and consequent role of the university in the social context, it is important to promote the university's contribution in providing the public sphere, including civil society, with the relevant and necessary expertise in developing, explaining, criticising and protecting these 'thicker notions of the good'. The university has an important role to play as an informative and scholarly institution towards solving society's problems, which could include the nourishment of intelligible arguments surrounding axiomatic premises that form such an integral part of society. Therefore civic engagement, properly understood, forms a valuable concept in the development of a vibrant democracy, contributing towards the establishment of an informed public opinion and public participation. Bruckardt *et al.* state that "... engagement promotes learning that will preserve and expand the individual attributes of independent thought, clear communication, and reasoned analysis that are necessary to a healthy democracy ..." (Bruckardt *et al.*, 2006:11). There is therefore no reason why civic engagement, also in the context of theory and faith, cannot assist this 'expansion of individual attributes of independent thought and reasoned analysis, that are so necessary for a healthy democracy'.

4. Implications for church and state

The church-state relationship also needs to be considered in the equation of civic engagement. There is no doubt that South Africa has a large Christian community which can be enriched by informative mechanisms, such as civic engagement. The Constitutional Court judgment of *Christian education South Africa v Minister of Education*⁵, emphasised the role of religion in a democratic society. Judge Sachs stated that religion is not always merely a matter of private individual conscience or communal sectarian practice, adding that:

... many major religions regard it as part of their spiritual vocation to be active in the broader society. Not only do they proselytise through the media and in the public square, religious bodies play a large part in public life, through schools, hospitals and poverty relief. They command ethical behaviour from their members and bear witness to the exercise of power by State and private agencies; they promote music, art and theatre; they

5 2000 (10) BCLR 1051.

provide halls for community activities, and conduct a great variety of social activities for their members and the general public. They are part of the fabric of public life, and constitute active elements of the diverse and pluralistic nation contemplated by the Constitution.⁶

In the recent judgment by the Constitutional Court⁷, Judge Sachs stated that although the rights of non-believers and minority faiths must be fully respected, the religious beliefs held by the great majority of South Africans must be taken seriously,⁸ and that “religious organisations constitute important sectors of national life ...”.⁹ If ‘religious sects’ play a large part in public life through schools and other institutions, if they form part of the fabric of public life, and if they constitute active elements of the diverse and pluralistic nation contemplated by the Constitution, then their relevance to the university’s scholarship role is confirmed. In the recent Pillay judgment¹⁰, it was stated that religious and cultural practices are protected because they are central to human identity and hence to human dignity (which is inextricably linked to the value of freedom¹¹), which is in turn central to equality.¹² According to the Court, a necessary element of freedom and of dignity of any individual is an “entitlement to respect for the unique set of ends that the individual pursues”, one of these

6 2000 (10) BCLR 1068. In *Prince v President of the Law Society of the Cape of Good Hope and Others* Judge Sachs stated: “One cannot imagine in South Africa today any legislative authority passing or sustaining laws which suppressed central beliefs and practices of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. These are well-organised religions, capable of mounting strong lobbies and in a position materially to affect the outcome of elections” (2002 (3) BCLR 289).

7 *Minister of Home Affairs and Other v Marié Adriaana Fourie and Others CCT 60/04 & Lesbian and Gay Equality Project and Eighteen Others v Minister of Home Affairs and Others CCT 10/05*.

8 ... par. 89. Judge Sachs refers to the judgment of *Christian Education ...* which reads: “For many believers, their relationship with God or creation is central to all their activities. It concerns their capacity to relate in an intensely meaningful fashion to their sense of themselves, their community and their universe. For millions in all walks of life, religion provides support and nurture and a framework for individual and social stability and growth. Religious belief has the capacity to awaken concepts of self-worth and human dignity which form the cornerstone of human rights. Such belief affects the believer’s view of society and finds a distinction between right and wrong. It expresses itself in the affirmation and continuity of powerful traditions that frequently have an ancient character transcending historical epochs and national boundaries. For believers, then, what is at stake is not merely a question of convenience or comfort, but an intensely held sense about what constitutes the good and proper life and their place in creation”, par. 89.

9 Par. 90.

10 *MEC for Education: KwaZulu-Natal and Others v Navaneethum Pillay CCT 51/06*.

11 Par. 63, p. 32.

12 Par. 62, p. 31.

ends being the voluntary religious and cultural practices in which we participate.¹³ The Court also stated that “the display of religion and culture in public is not a ‘parade of horrors’ but a pageant of diversity which will enrich our schools and in turn our country”.¹⁴

Consequently, the churches especially have an active role to play in developing the university’s theoretical and faith-orientated role in civic engagement. The churches in South Africa need to promote their religious interests by means of the insights associated with civil society.¹⁵ The role of the university in this regard should not be underestimated, especially taking into consideration the present state of affairs concerning the separation between church and state. Shils explains how the separation between church and state has progressed, while the university has grown in its relationship with government. The reason for this is that secular scientific and scholarly knowledge is pertinent to the purposes government has in view for their societies (Shils, 1978:179). In societies where universities and churches were once allied to each other, the separation of church and state has also been concomitant with the separation of church and university (Shils, 1978:180). Here one needs to be reminded of the fact that if the separation of church and state provided the means of keeping religious conflicts at bay, for example, then the lingering question is whether such separation also excludes valuable sources of public opinion on which democratic government itself may depend. (De Freitas, 2005:23).

In South Africa, there is no religiously grounded university as there are in the US, for example – there is no university in South Africa that is formally viewed as a Christian institution, especially when compared to universities such as Notre Dame, Bob Jones, Baylor, the Catholic University of America, and Brigham Young. The nearest that South Africa comes to a Christian university is the University of the North West’s Potchefstroom campus, this being a university which has had to sacrifice its formal recognition as being a Christian university, although it still maintains a specific Christian value ethos. On the other hand, the universities have faculties and departments specialising in theology and therefore the university’s responsibility towards society also needs to accommodate the theological aspect. This implies that the religious aspect

13 Par. 64, p. 32.

14 Par. 107, p. 55.

15 See: De Freitas, 2005:21-51.

emanating from the theological institutions on campus, also need to apply civic engagement from a faith and theoretical perspective. In fact, the sciences represented in the university (should) work together towards an inter-disciplinary civic engagement approach which also includes the faith-scholarly aspect (in addition to the material aspect).

Carter states that religions best serve democracy when they provide independent moral voices, and in this way are able to challenge and to a certain extent weaken the competing claims of the state (Carter, 1994:136). Carter comments that one of the great and important features of religion in a democracy is precisely its ability to spark in its adherents different visions of the meaning of life, different understandings of what is important (Carter, 1998-1999:989). A medium to do this is through the university, and one can include the civic engagement sector of the university to assist in this regard. The churches in South Africa form an integral component of civil society, and to exclude them from prioritisation within the context of civic engagement indirectly influences a proper understanding of the role of the university in civic engagement. This indirectly impacts on the essence of liberal pluralism and a representative democratic structure. Academics such as those in theology and law must understand and apply their responsibilities in this regard. It is the individuals within the university, and not the university itself, that need to stimulate this understanding. For example, the civic engagement policy of the University of the Free State¹⁶ makes provision for the opportunity for 'faith-based organisations' (hereby including the churches), to partner with the university in a civic engagement context, and this will depend on the willingness of individuals in the relevant areas of expertise to develop these initiatives, and to make sure that these initiatives are not merely pragmatic and materialistic.

One also needs to realise that because there are no traditionally religious universities in South Africa, there is already a backlog in terms of civic contributions by the secular universities to the church community. From the position of, let us say, a Christian university, the civic engagement structures and activities would most probably more easily accommodate engagement from a theoretical and moral point of view. However, on a positive note, the dominance of secular institutions of higher education should be accompanied by at least some sort of assistance and sensitivity

16 University of the Free State. Policy 06.1, Community Service Policy, http://www.uovs.ac.za/faculties/documents/14/Policy/13366-UFS_CS_Policy_UV_SD_beleid.pdf.

regarding theoretical and moral expertise specifically relevant to the church community of South Africa. One gets the idea that the accommodation of religion (more specifically in the traditional sense) is viewed by the university as yet another burden to be relegated to the private domain and which might lead to an added potential to conflict and sensitivities, which require the unnecessary depletion of resources in solving them. Consequently, this results in the negation of religion in the public sphere, which in turn is reflected in the mere solving of material and skills-based problems in the university's surrounding community (and beyond). With private, commercially-oriented sponsorships to university research projects on the increase, especially in the domain of the natural sciences, one could argue that the churches also should provide the necessary sponsorships to the university towards research on specific and contemporary relevant religious, theological and ethical issues. In this regard, the university could also be involved in civic engagement from a faith and theoretical aspect.

5. Conclusion

There are few formal policies to be found on the websites of the universities in South Africa. However, there are some universities with formal and well thought-through civic engagement policies that do allow for the application of civic engagement from a faith and theory perspective as well. For example, the 'Community Service Policy of the University of the Free State' defines 'community service' as: 'employing the scholarly expertise and resources of the UFS to render mutually beneficial services to communities within a context of reciprocal engagement and collaborative partnerships'.¹⁷ In turn, the term 'communities' is defined as: "specific, collective interest groups, conjoined in their search for sustainable solutions to development challenges ... contributing substantially to the mutual search for sustainable solutions to jointly identified challenges and service needs of the full range of resources at their disposal".¹⁸ From this it is clear that the understanding ascribed to 'community service' is open to various interpretations and therefore is rather inclusive – and rightly so. This policy should be applauded for its inclusive formulation, leaving academic interest groups within the university with the responsibility of applying community service also in a theoretical context. With a policy worded in such a way, and bearing in

17 Par. 3.1.1., 7.

18 Par. 3.1.2., 7.

mind the aforementioned motivations, there is no reason why support should not be ascribed to the faith and theoretical aspect within civic engagement.

Understanding the university as a place of scholarship regarding foundational truths, implies the proper accommodation of faith (and consequently issues pertaining to morality, religion, culture, ethics, and pure theory) within the university. This implies that the university both in its internal as well as external responsibilities, and also as part of its core functions in its teaching, research and civic engagement aims, needs to include the faith aspect. In today's secular climate, faith has come to be perceived as being separated from the public sphere and limited to the domain of the individual, family or church. However, taking into consideration that all facts come to a point where they cannot be further explained, faith acts as an important pre-factual area of scholarship. Philosophy teaches us that the epistemological, cosmological and ethical side of the sciences belongs to the domain of faith and ideology. Consequently, if faith is so important for a university, then the same can be said regarding the relevance of religion for the application and understanding of civic engagement.

The university as the hub of intellect needs to provide an intellectual service, not only to the student sphere of the community, but also to the community as understood in a wider context. This service should comprise both *techno* and *theory*, *theory in the sense of seeking and discussing fundamental truths*. Implicated in the latter is faith, and it is precisely this part of higher education that especially requires emphasis. Not only should theory in the deeper sense be emphasised, but also theory understood in the sense of an informed community regarding values, morals and fundamental truths. In this regard, the university's role in civic engagement will have to *convincingly* transcend the pragmatic and empirical. In many cases ignorance of this leads to the very disadvantages that *techno* tries to solve or remedy.

It is also important to note that although many universities may contribute to society from a theoretical and religious point of view, the question to be asked is whether this takes place under the banner of civic engagement or something else. In addition to the fact that policies in South African institutions of higher education (universities) on this issue are either absent or vague and open to a wider interpretation, it is important to determine the answer(s) to this question for the following reasons: Firstly, it is required of lecturers to participate in civic engagement activities. However, this should not be done to the detriment of the lecturer's original

calling regarding theoretical scholarship. Secondly, and more importantly, to exclude the theoretical and religious exercise from the banner of civic engagement will rob the university of its theoretical nucleus, eventually transforming it into a mere societal upliftment institution in the material sense. In addition, the gradual exclusion of anything faith-based or religious from activities of the university, including civic engagement, will cause the university's faith-based or religious orientation eventually to disintegrate, and consequently the university will eventually ignore an important aspect of its scholarship mandate to all the relevant interest groups in society. Thirdly, the exclusion of community engagement as a theoretical exercise could have financial disadvantages in the sense that funding might be unfairly limited regarding civic engagement initiatives that are purely theoretical in nature, thus risking the exclusion of vital education regarding important moral aspects in society. This could also have implications for the application of academic freedom, because of constraints placed upon the academic's theoretical contribution to society. Fourthly, in the spirit of liberal pluralism and communitarianism, various goods, ends and interest groups in society will receive theoretical contributions that satisfy inherent philosophical foundations.

One must note that where natural science ends, trouble begins. Natural science ends at that part of man that is not body (whatever that may be), and all that is human lies outside of natural science (Bloom, 1978:356). The university of today needs to take note of this, especially regarding its role in civic engagement, where emphasis must be given to the proper functioning of the theoretical, religious, and scholarly compass. Only in such a climate can the university remain true to its original calling and contribute towards the development and protection of a true and effective democratic society. The implications of this, especially for the social sciences and more specifically in fields such as the law, education, economics, political theory and sociology, are fundamental to say the least. The important fact, that risks and threats in society are not limited to the material but also extend to the transcendental sphere, needs to be realised and taken seriously. A society in material prosperity only is a superficialised society, a society without trans-material interest and purpose, like a ship that sails without a compass. As a result, such a society is easily tempted by any normative aspect and it is usually mere popularity which qualifies a norm. The university's civic responsibility in this regard is to cultivate 'deeper' societal issues, issues related to freedom of participation and loyalty to norms and interests.

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