

Christians under fire at Stellenbosch University

—by Taryn Hodgson

A Stellenbosch University professor believes that Christianity “should retreat” and prayer should not be allowed at official university events in order for “tolerance to advance”. These comments were made at an open debate held earlier this year, at Stellenbosch, called by university officials in response to a Dagbreek Residence House Committee member who prayed for a troubled student.

Christians have also come under fire in several other incidents at the university, raising concerns for many about a growing anti-Christian prejudice on campus.

Reaction to anti-family indoctrination called “Homophobic”

A Dagbreek House Committee member commented that he “doesn’t support gays” in response to an Orientation Week talk in January on ‘Sex and Sexuality’ at Dagbreek Residence by a student group called Mojo. (During the talk, a picture of two male students kissing was shown). Mojo then laid a complaint against the student at the university’s Division for Student Discipline.

Petition against demonic art

In a separate matter, Shofar Christian

Church, a large church in the area, initiated a petition on 24 March, asking the Stellenbosch Municipality to remove two grotesque, almost demonic looking, half-man, half-wildebeest sculptures with their genitals exposed, placed on Rooiplein.

The petition received much media attention and drew harsh criticism from university officials.

The petition requested that the sculptures be rather placed in an art gallery instead of on an open thoroughfare on campus.



The infamous Rooiplein on Stellenbosch Campus

munities and Religious Practice: Where to in a Scientific, Democratic and Constitutional Community?” at the Rooiplein (Red Square) amphitheatre was held on 16 May. Die Matie student newspaper reports that Professor Nico Koopman, Dean of the Theology Faculty and Professor Stan du Plessis, former chair of Oud-Dagbreekbond, and the Vice Dean of research for the Faculty of Economic Management Sciences, were asked to lead the debate. Die Matie reports that Prof. Koopman cautioned against individuals that are not willing to respect different religious views. Prof. Koopman argued that healthy religious practices in the public sphere must enhance human dignity.

No prayer allowed

Prof. du Plessis suggested the default on campus should be no religious practices, including no prayer at graduation and no religious activities in residences. “There is room for secularisation in halls of residences,” du Plessis added.

He also argued that tolerance on campus will advance if religion “retreated a little”. With

reference to the recent happenings on campus, Prof. du Plessis emphasised that personal religious views cannot serve as a justification for behaviour in the public sphere.

“We are not a Christian University. We contaminate the heart of Christianity if we talk about a Christian University.”
Prof. Koopman

“Not a Christian University”

Comments from the floor included a student stating that Stellenbosch University should not be seen as a Christian University and Dagbreek should not be regarded as a Christian residence. Prof. Koopman responded by saying: “We are not a Christian University. I would not like Stellenbosch to be called a Christian University. We contaminate the heart of Christianity if we talk about a Christian University.”

The Stellenbosch University General Academic Calendar, however, states that according to the Constitutional Act of 1996, religious worship “may be engaged”

in official meetings, public ceremonies and in university residences. The Calendar stipulates that “religious worship” refers to the Christian faith, as “the substantial majority

of the university community at SU is of the Christian faith”.

Opportunity to make a stand

According to Prof. du Plessis, the debate around this issue has only just started. “I hope that there will be more of these conversations and that a leader from one of the big Charismatic churches will also participate”. Prof. Koopman added that he would like to see specific issues addressed in a more concrete manner in future.

An open invitation to students and the general public has been given to comment on the online public forum (<http://blogs.>

Disturbing incidences have taken place at the University of Stellenbosch – from obscene sculpture exhibitions to biased debates about religion on campus.



Dagbreek Residence

Praying for a possessed student

On 24 April, the representative for Spirituality on the House Committee of Dagbreek Residence gathered a group of fellow students to pray for a man who seemed troubled and had been running around naked and hysterical, swearing loudly. After returning to his room, the troubled student bashed himself against the wall and smashed a window. He was then taken to hospital by House Committee members.

Red Square debate

When university officials learnt of this incident, a debate entitled “Residence Com-



Christians under fire at Stellenbosch University

sun.ac.za/kampusgesprekke) that has been created specifically to respond to issues raised at the Red Square Debate.

Student reactions to the debate

One student who commented on the official Rooiplein debate online forum, felt that the purpose of the debate was not "adequately or accurately dealt with – in that, as a student in leadership, how do you reconcile your individual beliefs with what is required of you in your position? From the name of the debate to the lack of equally-matched opponents [on 2 different sides]...this

debate was flawed to be an attack on a single expression of faith – Charismatic Christianity."

try and understand God scientifically, and if we cannot prove God or healing through prayer scientifically, then there is no place for God, or prayer for healing?"

Another person reacted strongly to Prof. du Plessis' call for secularisation: "Red



The controversial half-man, half-beast sculptures that Christians are petitioning against

views expel alternative religious [world-views] [in the name of being] 'tolerant', 'open-minded', 'scientific', and [rational]. Was it not men and women of the Christian faith who brought about the greatest beneficial changes towards the concept of a free, democratic society we know today? Are we going to deny the very reason that institutions like Stellenbosch, and even greater universities around the world, exist?"

The Christian origins of Stellenbosch University

Stellenbosch University was originally started in 1859 as a seminary

city was founded on as it was established training pastors.

for training pastors, by John Murray, brother of Andrew Murray. His vision was to prove invaluable, as the following year, a mighty Revival swept the Cape, and churches experienced exponential growth. Dagbreek Koshuis, in fact, used to be known as John Murray Huis.

The very name 'university' testifies to its Christian origins. The latin words *Uni Veritas* means 'one truth.'

Most professors today don't even believe that there is an objective truth. How is it that Western universities, which were mostly founded by Christians and often produced dedicated Christian Reformers, have now become synonymous with immorality, perversion and anti-Christian hostility?

Reclaim campuses for Christ
University campuses of South Africa need »

Stellenbosch Univer-
Christian principles
as a seminary for

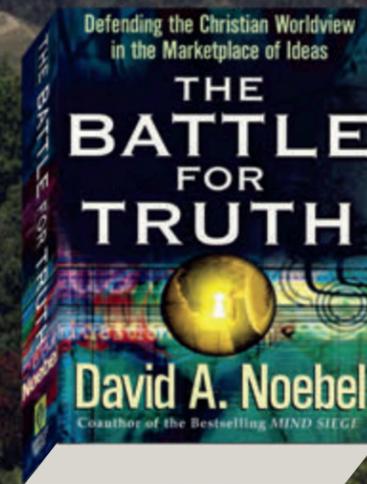
debate was flawed to be an attack on a single expression of faith – Charismatic Christianity."

Intolerance of Christianity

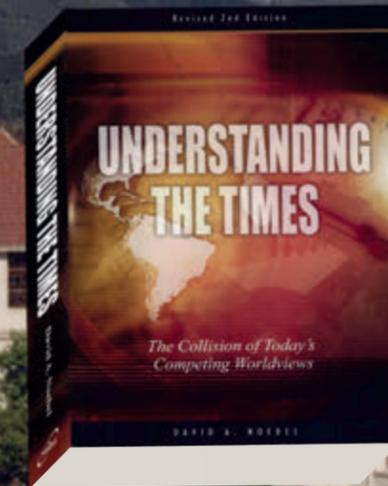
The same student commented further that he agreed with some of Prof. du Plessis points, but "his prejudice against a certain expression [of faith] comes out in one of his later statements...it would be nice if one of the Charismatic Church leaders would be in the debate in future'. So is he really against Christianity in the koshuis or just the non-traditional view of Christianity in the koshuis? I would love to believe that there was nothing sinister in the subject heading of this debate: 'Where to in a Scientific, Democratic and Constitutional Community'. What is the University of Stellenbosch trying to say here? 'Let's

lights went on [for me]...because the same rhetoric has been going on all around the [Western] world. The term 'secular' sounds good in theory but what does it really come down to in practice? No institution is ever truly secular. It is run by and consists of people who operate according to specific worldviews, of which many are in conflict. 'Secular' has become the word through which people who hold secular humanistic

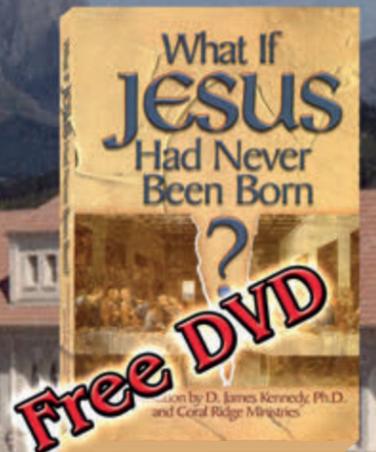
RECLAIM YOUR CAMPUS FOR CHRIST



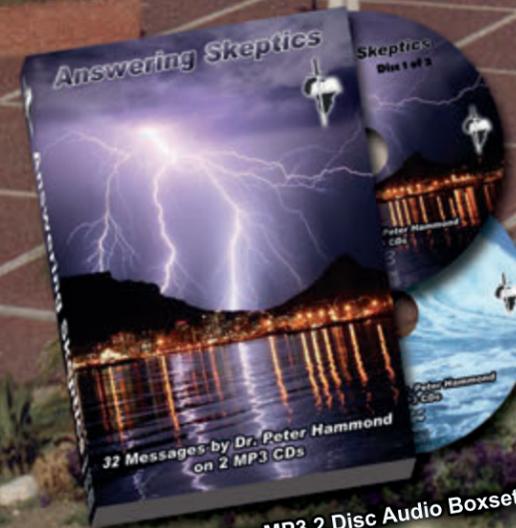
400 PAGES R155



528 PAGES
HARDCOVER R299
SOFTCOVER R235



with each purchase of these advertised books.



Answering Skeptics MP3 2 Disc Audio Boxset R120



Answering Skeptics book - 144 pages by Dr. Peter Hammond - R75

Combo Special Offer

MP3 Set and Book for only R170



CHRISTIAN LIBERTY BOOKS

PO BOX 358 HOWARD PLACE 7450 PINELANDS Cape Town
South Africa TEL/FAX : 021 689 7478
admin@christianlibertybooks.co.za
www.christianlibertybooks.co.za



Christians under fire at Stellenbosch University

Students at the debate



Photo: Justin Alberts

not be the cesspools of immorality, rebellion and hotbed of anti-Christian worldviews that they are today. By God's grace, they can be reclaimed for Christ. To do this, we need to recognise the agenda of Secular Humanists to intimidate Christians into silence and equip Christians to understand and defend their faith and heritage. We need to resolve

the weak minded. It is not enough to simply believe. You have to know what you believe and why you believe it. And you need to be able to defend it. Africa Christian Action's Biblical Worldview Seminars will enable you to understand and respond in a Biblical way to everything from relativism to dualism, from Hollywood to Humanism,

Sending your children to university is an enormous investment. We need to make sure they are equipped to handle the challenging worldviews on campus.

to win students to Christ and effectively disciple them in a Biblical Worldview.

Christians must wake up!

Sending our children to university is a huge investment, both financially, and spiritually. Before sending them to university, we should ensure that they are practically and spiritually prepared to deal with the issues, temptations and pressures that they will inevitably face there. Christianity is not for

from Marxism to Islam.

Contact us to request speakers, books and films for your campus group, or if you want us to run a Biblical Worldview Seminar at your church or school: 021 689 4480 or info@christianaction.org.za ■

TARYN HODGSON is the International Co-ordinator of the Christian Action Network. For helpful resources and related information, call 021 689 4481 or admin@christianaction.org.za www.christianaction.org.za

STUDENT MINISTRY FORUM – OFFICIAL STATEMENT:

- Shofar Christian Church • Grace Life Church • Every Nation Christian Church • New Generation Church • St Paul's Evangelical Church • Anglican Chaplaincy • Kruiskerk • Gereformeerde Kerk and Stellenbosch Gemeente •

"We as the Student Ministry Forum, representative of the majority of student congregations in Stellenbosch, would like to respond to what we believe to be frequent misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the role of Christianity on campus.

The Christian Faith was the original impetus behind the establishment of Stellenbosch University and we believe can continue to add significant value to this great institution. Christianity has always provided inspiration and motivation to young people to think about their studies in relation to serving society and promoting the common good.

We are committed to Jesus Christ's command to love all people, regardless of who they are and what they believe, while upholding Biblical Truth. We believe this truth is objective and should be lived out in public and are open to it being scrutinised and openly discussed in the public sphere."