

# White identity development at the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) from 1965-1968 through the use of language and religion<sup>1</sup>

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## ***Abstract***

The primary goal in the establishment of RAU in 1968 was the educational advancement of the white Afrikaans speaker on the Witwatersrand. A secondary goal was the development of white Afrikaans identity in higher education through the use of the Afrikaans language and Christian religion. This was done by means of academic and scientific programmes. The Afrikaner culture in its entirety had to be nurtured. Although the RAU, for the majority of white Afrikaans speakers, represented a momentous time in terms of its creation history and architectural design it also had its main aim the moulding of a new modern Afrikaans identity. The perceived struggling “Boer” – “proletarian” and working class character of the white Afrikaans speaker had to make way for an emerging middle class: modern and sophisticated. In this article, light is shed on the role of especially language and religion in developing a modern white Afrikaans identity at RAU, later renamed the University of Johannesburg.

**Keywords:** Mother-tongue education; Christian National Education (CNE); Witwatersrand; Rand Afrikaans University (RAU); Religion; Identity; Modernising; Liberalism; Afrikaans Spirit; Christian Nationalism.

## **Introduction**

The establishment of the former Rand Afrikaans University RAU (now the University of Johannesburg) had as main goal the education and advancement of white Afrikaans speakers on the Witwatersrand through the medium of Afrikaans as language. Unconsciously religion has been nurtured as part of the educational process.<sup>2</sup> The perceived disadvantaged educational status of white Afrikaans speakers on the Witwatersrand during the 1950s was fundamentally embedded in their economic, political and social history

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1 JN Klee, “The establishment of the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) 1955-1968: A centerpiece in education of modernising Afrikaner livelihood” (PhD University of the North-West, 2017).

2 JN Klee, “The establishment of the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) 1955-1968: A centerpiece in education of modernising Afrikaner livelihood” (PhD University of the North-West, 2017), pp. 132-137.

mythology. A history extending back to especially the suffering of Afrikaners associated with the South African War (1899-1902) and the social economic hardships that followed.<sup>3</sup>

In this article, the positioning of language and religion in the modern education of white Afrikaans speaking students during the early years of RAU towards developing a leadership identity will be discussed.

### ***Contextual historical background***

Compelled by poverty white Afrikaans speakers increasingly moved to the Witwatersrand between the 1910s and 1920s in hope of finding employment.<sup>4</sup> This move to urbanised areas worsened their precarious economic and social status, which was largely aggravated by the low level of education. White Afrikaans speakers had been culturally marginalised in urban areas by post-war circumstances and it was up to cultural leadership, the clergy and educationists in their circles to make the Afrikaner aware of their educational needs – one was the necessity for an Afrikaans university.<sup>5</sup> It was believed that white Afrikaans speakers required access to higher education in their home language. This education, it was envisioned, would equip them with skills, which could contribute to their economic and social advancement.<sup>6</sup>

The move of communities of people to the Witwatersrand ended years of agricultural practices and the geographical isolation of the white Afrikaans speaker labelled as being a *Boerevolk* (farming folk).<sup>7</sup> By the 1950s to early 1960s, they were a socially, economically and politically disadvantaged grouping on the Witwatersrand. Their aspiration was to become modern and be uplifted through the availability of appropriate higher education in their mother tongue, a notion regularly expressed by various groupings.<sup>8</sup> RAU's establishment played a crucial role in fulfilling some of these aspirations. The newly-established university boasted modern educational and administrative

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3 University of Johannesburg Archive (UJ/RAU), Johannesburg, PJ Meyer collection, File C1/1, The planning of the Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg, 1968, p. 3.

4 ELP Stals, *Afrikaners in die Goudstad, Deel 2, 1924-1961* (Pretoria, HAUM Opvoedkundige Uitgewery, 1986), pp. 4-5.

5 Heritage Foundation Archive (HFA), Pretoria, File, AB 12/256, Box no. 3/1/7, Onderwys: Die taak, p. 1.

6 JN Klee, "The establishment of the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) 1955-1968: A centerpiece in education of modernising Afrikaner livelihood" (PhD University of the North-West, 2017) pp. 77-78.

7 HW van der Merwe, *Identiteit en verandering* (Kaapstad, Tafelberg-uitgewers, 1975), p. 45.

8 D Lavin, "The dilemma of Christian-National education in South Africa", *The World Today*, 21(10), 1965, p. 430; J Klee, "Die verwesenliking van 'n Afrikanerdroom: Die stigting van die Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit, 1955-1968", *New Contree*, 60(11), 2010, pp. 136-138.

methods, specifically aimed at addressing the shortcomings experienced by the “backward *Boervolk*” towards securing a more sophisticated identity – that of an educated white Afrikaans speaker who was ready and willing to learn and subsequently lead. They were in a phase of a “second Great Trek” from the rural areas to the city, and from farming to big business, with modernisation as the primary aim.<sup>9</sup>

The white Afrikaans population increase on the Witwatersrand was another dynamic factor which contributed to the need to establish a white Afrikaans university. The increase of white Afrikaans-speaking pupils at primary school level, and the establishment of the first Afrikaans high schools such as the Hoërskool Voortrekker, Hoërskool Helpmekaar and Hoërskool Monument was proof of this increase. By 1951, it was therefore clear that the need for education to white Afrikaans children and students on the Witwatersrand was gaining ground due to the rapid increase in Afrikaans primary and high schools. The number of white Afrikaans school children increased from 39 299 in 1941 to 54 821 in 1951.<sup>10</sup> By the late 1950s, the increase in the establishment of Afrikaans schools in Johannesburg provided adequate student numbers for tertiary education. This was a powerful factor in favour of the establishment of tertiary Afrikaans educational facilities for white Afrikaans speakers on the Witwatersrand.<sup>11</sup>

The group’s population growth was also reflected in an increase in the number of congregations of the Afrikaans Christian religious denominations. Afrikaans churches were instrumental in providing much needed support to this group living in the Witwatersrand in matters of social welfare and economic support from the state. Indeed, by the early 1960s, more than 330 000 white Afrikaans speakers had settled on the Witwatersrand. The Afrikaans media pointed out that the group’s numerical increase in numbers was responsible for the establishment in February 1961 of the Goudstad Teaching College in Johannesburg and that it would most certainly also contribute to the demand for the establishment of an exclusively white Afrikaans university.<sup>12</sup> In 1951, the number of Afrikaans primary schools had increased to 97 and high schools to 15. By 1962, these numbers had increased even further to 105 primary and

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9 MA Beale, “Apartheid goals in the 1960s: The creation of the University of Port Elizabeth and the Rand Afrikaans University” (Seminar paper delivered at the University of the Witwatersrand on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1995), p. 20.

10 ELP Stals *et al.*, *Afrikaners in die Goudstad, Deel 2...*, p. 136.

11 JN Klee, “The establishment of the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) 1955-1968: A centerpiece in education of modernising Afrikaner livelihood” (PhD University of the North-West, 2017) p. 53.

12 *Die Transvaler*, 2 August 1962.

29 high schools. By the 1960s, the available educational statistical profile convinced the Transvaal educational authorities to agree to the establishment of the Goudstad Teachers Training College, which opened its doors in the educational sphere of the city of Johannesburg. The college, however, only provided training for students to become teachers.<sup>13</sup> White Afrikaans speakers were fully aware that they simply had to be trained in different professional fields to secure their social and economic position on the Witwatersrand.

It must be noted that the establishment of RAU was racial exclusionary in nature as was the case of many other white Afrikaans university in South Africa. Examples such as the University of Stellenbosch, the University of the Free State, University of Pretoria and today's North-West University in Potchefstroom can be mentioned here. Relevant literature on these universities includes Bernardus's *Stellenbosch 1866-1966: Honderd jaar hoër onderwys*;<sup>14</sup> The University of the Free State's *Van sink tot sandsteen tot graniët: Die eerste 100 jaar van die Universiteit van die Vrystaat*;<sup>15</sup> Universiteit van Pretoria, *AD Destinatum; gedenkboek van die Universiteit van Pretoria*;<sup>16</sup> Van der Schyff's *Wonderdaad ...! Die PUK tot 1951: wording, vestiging en selfstandigheid*,<sup>17</sup> and the study edited by Van Eeden, *In U Lig: die PU vir CHO van selfstandigheid tot samesmelting 1951-2004*.<sup>18</sup> These universities however has underwent major decolonisation and transformational changes since 1994. RAU itself started to allow black students into the university in the mid-1980s although very limited.<sup>19</sup>

### **Mother-tongue education as an anchor towards identity formation**

Mother-tongue education has always been a very important educational tool in developing societies. In this regard, Johnson elaborates on this notion and explains this basic function, as he phrases it, in all civilized (developed) societies. According to him this mother-tongue education not only transfers

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13 UJ/RAU Archive, PJ Meyer collection, File C 1/1, Request for the establishment of the Rand Afrikaans University, no date, p. 1.

14 HB Thom (ed), *Stellenbosch 1866-1966; honderd jaar hoër onderwys* (Stellenbosch, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1966), p. 599.

15 Universiteit van die Vrystaat, *Van sink tot sandsteen tot graniët: Die eerste 100 jaar van die Universiteit van die Vrystaat* (Paarl, Paarl Print, 2006), p. 457.

16 Universiteit van Pretoria, *AD Destinatum; gedenkboek van die Universiteit van Pretoria* (Johannesburg, Voortrekkerpers Beperk, 1960), p. 445.

17 PF van der Schyff, *Wonderdaad ...! Die PUK tot 1951: Wording, vestiging en selfstandigheid* (Paarl Print, Potchefstroom, 2003), p. 709.

18 ES van Eeden (Red.), *In U Lig: Die PU vir CHO van selfstandigheid tot samesmelting 1951-2004* (Potchefstroom, DCom Design, 2005), p. 449.

19 E Brink, *University of Johannesburg: the university of a new generation* (Singapore, Craft Print, 2010).

culture, equipping and educating people for specialised roles, it also acts as a force of change and continuity. He observes:<sup>20</sup>

How these functions are fulfilled[,] varies from society to society and even at different times within the same society depending upon the character of the economy, the family, the political organisation, and the religion.

RAU's establishment serves as an example of how a culture-specific group in a given cultural environment endeavoured to realise these functions. The founding of RAU therefore was driven by the goal to meet the needs of white Afrikaners and to realise their ambitions on the Witwatersrand<sup>21</sup> driven by an Afrikaans and Christian nationalist spirit and character.<sup>22</sup>

Dr PJ Meyer, one of the main protagonists for the creation of RAU, believed in a strong association between language and religion referring specifically to schoolchildren in relation to Christian nationalist values in the 1940s. He had the following to say of bilingualism and its effects on religious life:<sup>23</sup>

... bilingual children show backwardness in development as compared to monolingual children ... Bilingualism leads to moral relativism which reaches right into the religious life of the individual. It is certain that Godlessness is more prevalent among bilingual people than among monolinguals.

This somewhat monotonous subjective statement in itself became in later years an anchor for RAU's emphasis on mother-tongue education simultaneously strengthening Christian nationalist values viewed as imperative for Afrikaans speaking students. White Afrikaans speakers on the Witwatersrand were exposed to a variety of "negative" influences associated with city life. It was idealised that RAU's creation would consequently play an important role in shaping a modern, yet religious, Afrikaans identity.<sup>24</sup>

To understand how, and in what way the use of the mother tongue also was instrumental in identity formation, it is necessary to briefly analyse the relationship between language and identity. This relationship is important to

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20 WR Johnson, "Education: Keystone of apartheid", *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 13(3), 1982, p. 214.

21 MA Beale, "Apartheid goals in the 1960s..." (Seminar paper delivered at the University of the Witwatersrand on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1995), p. 8.

22 UJ/RAU, Johannesburg, PJ Meyer collection, File C1/6, Die Beplanning van die Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit, p. 52.

23 TG Regan, The politics of linguistic apartheid: language policies in black education in South Africa, *The Journal of Negro Education*, 56(3), 1987, p. 303.

24 UJ library, *Gedenk-album van die opening van die R.A.U.*, 24 February 1968, Speech of the Chancellor Dr N Diedericks, 21-2, UJ/RAU, P J Meyer-collection, File C1/1, Interview (transcribed) with Dr P J Meyer on 4 July 1983 on his plot "Halfpad" in Witpoortjie 81 by Mr Jan Cronjé, Leader of the archival project of RAU and from 1 May 1967 to the end of 1981 Communications Manager of RAU, pp. 66-70.

understand. After all, the main aim in the creation of RAU was the formation of a new, modern identity for white Afrikaans speakers.

### ***Historiographic pointers to the association between mother-tongue education and identity formation***

In his book *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious*, John proposes that language gives rise to identity by abstracting the world of experience into words.<sup>25</sup> He argues that the encounter with language brings people to an advanced understanding of experience, which, in turn, enables users to conceptualise themselves rather than simply being themselves.<sup>26</sup> He then concludes that identity is closely related to language and that the phenomenon of identity can be understood as a linguistic one.<sup>27</sup> Thornborrow also, in turn, argues that the most fundamental way in which we establish our identity is through language.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Language, identity and self justification***

In an article entitled “The nature of Afrikaner Nationalism”, Goldberg presents a similar argument. He goes even further by stating that language and identity are important criteria by which a nation is recognised and by which it has the right to form a state on its own.<sup>29</sup> In this regard, it is important to note that language furthermore enables the possible extension of social control. For example, in the early 1800s, shortly after the British acquisition of the Cape of Good Hope the colonial authorities attempted, through a policy of education, to “anglicise” the early nascent Afrikaner community. These efforts were resumed with the Cape Education Act in 1866, which compelled the use of English in all first- and second-class schools. This Act almost resulted in the disappearance of Dutch as a medium of instruction.<sup>30</sup> British efforts to control the language of education resulted in deep resentment on the part of white Afrikaans speakers in the Cape Colony and increased Afrikaner resistance to any attempts to reduce the importance of

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25 JE Joseph, *Language and identity; national, ethnic, religious* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 11; I Hofmeyr, “Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and ethnic identity, 1902-1924”, S Marks and S Trapido (eds), *The politics of race, class and nationalism in twentieth-century South Africa*, (New York, Longman, 1987).

26 JE Joseph, *Language and identity...*, p. 11.

27 JE Joseph, *Language and identity...*, p. 12.

28 J Thornborrow, “Language and identity”, L Thomas and S Wareing, *Language, society and power; and introduction* (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 136.

29 M Goldberg, “The nature of Afrikaner nationalism”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 23(1), 1985, p. 129.

30 WR Johnson, “Education: Keystone of apartheid”, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 13(3), 1982, p. 215.

Afrikaans mother-tongue education. In years to come, specifically after the South African War, as well as the Second Afrikaans Language Movement, following Milner's anti-Afrikaans policies after 1902 led to the adoption, after the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, of Afrikaans as a language of school instruction in 1915. There was a marked increase in the publication of Afrikaans books from the late 1910s, which paved the way for the recognition of Afrikaans as an official language in 1925, in preference to Dutch.<sup>31</sup> The historical resentment towards efforts to reduce the use of the Afrikaans language resulted in increasing efforts by white Afrikaans speakers to establish autonomous Christian National Afrikaans schools complimenting Dutch schools.<sup>32</sup> The founding of RAU many years later and the use of the mother tongue as its medium of instruction would play a crucial role in the educational advancement of Afrikaans-speaking students, especially on the Witwatersrand. It would enhance identity formation to promote self-empowerment and to modernise the Afrikaner identity.<sup>33</sup>

The efforts of white Afrikaans speakers to develop the Afrikaans language and to enhance its role in education is discussed in Van Wyk's article "Afrikaans Language, Literature and Identity". His argument concurs with the views of Joseph and Thornborrow on the relationship between language and identity. However, his discussion expands their findings by relating language and identity, specifically to the position of white Afrikaans speakers in the mid-twentieth century. He argues, by looking back to the late nineteenth century, for a close interrelationship between Afrikaner identity, language (Afrikaans) and literature. In Van Wyk's opinion, the first attempts to link the development of the Afrikaners' national consciousness with the Afrikaans language occurred in the late 1800s with the rise of the so-called First Afrikaans Language Movement (1875 to 1890s), with its aim of establishing Afrikaans as a written language, as well as in the founding of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Taalbond in 1890.<sup>34</sup>

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31 WAM Carstens and N Bosman, *Kontemporêre Afrikaanse taalkunde* (Pretoria, Van Schaik uitgewers, 2014), pp. 51-56.

32 WR Johnson, "Education: Keystone of apartheid", *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 13(3), 1982, p. 216.

33 JC Steyn, *Ons gaan 'n taal maak: Afrikaans sedert die patriot-jare* (Pretoria, Kraal-uitgewers, 2014), pp. 362-363.

34 J van Wyk, "Afrikaans language, literature and identity", *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 77, 1991, pp. 79-80.



Since 1906, according to Van Wyk, authors like Du Toit and Preller,<sup>35</sup> who were members of the second Afrikaans language movement believed that Afrikaans literature had to be developed to assist in the shaping of Afrikaner identity.<sup>36</sup> Preller, for example, felt so strongly about the relationship between language and identity that he described it as something that was not just a construction of grammatical rules and laws or a series of black markings on white paper, but something that represented the imagery of thoughts of people and the continuous changing inner consciousness of Humankind. To Preller, the Afrikaans language was synonymous with the existence, the thoughts and the “inner” being of the Afrikaner. For this reason, he and others, including Marais much later, viewed Afrikaans literature as the “symbiotic inter-text of language and identity”. Afrikaans language and literature, at the time, were regarded as important elements reflecting the character of the people; that is, of the *volk*.<sup>37</sup> The development of Afrikaans in the late 1800s and early 1900s proved that the language served to unite white Afrikaans speakers of all classes.<sup>38</sup> It thus became a powerful instrument in decades to come for uplifting, unifying, developing, advancing and modernising white Afrikaans speakers.

### *Language and character formation*

Decades later, in the context of the establishment of RAU and the fact that Afrikaans as a language was well established as an official and academic language, Meyer must have indulged in the views of Preller that basically shaped his world of thinking about the Afrikaners and their language. Preller’s views, dating back to the first half of the twentieth Century, were made relevant for the future RAU. Meyer had the following to say about the importance of mother-tongue language and its relation to the *volk* (Freely translated to English):<sup>39</sup>

Afrikaans, ons moedertaal, is nie net die draer, die uitdraer, die omlyner van ons eie onderskeidende kulturele Afrikanerskap nie; is nie net die omvattendste

35 Both these individuals were actively involved in the development of the Afrikaans language. They both were involved in the founding of the Afrikaanse Taalgenootskap (ATG) and the founding of the Zuid-Afrikaanse Akademie voor Taal, Letterkunde en Kunste. See WJ de Kock, *Dictionary of South African biography*, 1 (Cape Town, Nasionale Boekhandel Bpk., 1972), p. 645.

36 J Van Wyk, “Afrikaans language, literature and identity”, *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 77, 1991, p. 80.

37 J Van Wyk, “Afrikaans language, literature and identity”, *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 77, 1991, pp. 79-80; JC Steyn, *Ons gaan ’n taal maak...*, pp. 362-368.

38 Institute for Contemporary History (INEG Archive), Bloemfontein, P J Meyer collection, File PV 720 – Box 25, Afrikaans, Ons Moedertaal, p. 84.

39 INEG, P J Meyer collection, File PV 720 – box 3, Die Taak van die Afrikaanse Kultuurorganisasie: Nou en vorentoe, p. 4.



groeïende vorm waarin ons eie histories-geworde en histories-wordende Afrikanerskap sy neerslag vind nie; maar is die lewendige, gemeenskaplike geestesbesit waarin ons denke, ons skeppingsvermoë selfveredelend, selfverrykend werk en weskaf. Gee jou moedertaal prys; verknoei en vermin jou moedertaal, en jy verknoei en vermin jou volksiel; en andersom, as jy geen respek vir jou eie volk het nie, verloor jy jou selfrespek en eerbiedig jy nie jou moedertaal nie.

(Afrikaans, our mother tongue, is not only the carrier or delineator of our unique cultural Afrikaner identity; it is not only the most comprehensive way in which our own historic Afrikaner identity has developed historically, but is the living communal property in which our thoughts, our creative ability and being come to self-realisation. Give up your mother tongue; muddle up and neglect using your mother tongue and you will do the same regarding your national soul and, vice versa, if you disrespect your people, you will lose your self-respect and disrespect your mother tongue as well).

Thus, for Meyer, the Afrikaans language constituted the core characteristic of the existence of white Afrikaans speakers: It not only served to truly identify white Afrikaans speakers, but helped others to also understand them. Meyer firmly believed there was a close connection between people's mother tongue and their identity. To him, language – in this case Afrikaans – was pivotal in shaping the identity of white Afrikaans speakers, especially in terms of how they viewed themselves and their relationship to communities, culture and religion.

The Afrikaans language was thus regarded as an important element of the character of the *volk* (Afrikaans people). Afrikaans as a language, especially in the cities on the Witwatersrand and in the context of the late 1800s and early 1900s, increasingly appeared to be the language of the “proletariat” or, at least, the language of a group rapidly becoming “proletarian”. In this period and especially in the light of the disadvantaged political and economic position of white Afrikaans speakers on the Witwatersrand, Afrikaans was a powerful instrument for communicating with and for mobilising the white Afrikaans-speaking working class. Preller regarded this as crucial to developing and uplifting the group of Afrikaans speakers through the medium of their own language.<sup>40</sup> RAU therefore would become an important vehicle in achieving this goal.

### **Identity through mother-tongue education at RAU**

State President N Diederichs' inauguration of the newly constructed administrative offices and lecture buildings of this first Afrikaans university

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40 INEG, P J Meyer collection, File PV 720 - box 25, Afrikaans, Ons Moedertaal, pp. 2-3.

on the Witwatersrand (RAU) in May 1975, seven years after its establishment (1968), provided a proud and emotional moment for many white Afrikaans speakers on the Witwatersrand.<sup>41</sup> It also coincided with the centenary of the establishment at Paarl of the Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners in 1875, a date many Afrikaners at the time considered the birthdate of Afrikaans.<sup>42</sup> The university established in 1968 represented something momentous for white Afrikaans speakers and particularly students on the Witwatersrand. RAU as an Afrikaans mother-tongue institution of higher education, become a symbolic monument for the indigenous Afrikaans language.<sup>43</sup> The institution would fulfil its role in uplifting, moulding, advancing and modernising white Afrikaans speakers who had come a long way from being the struggling “Boer” – “proletarian” and working class – to becoming the emerging middle class. The symbolic presence of white Afrikaans speakers and their new ability to gain a foothold in this urban space signalled a great achievement locally and abroad. Diederichs therefore considered the creation of RAU to be the greatest breakthrough in an era where, as he reckoned, all the odds were still “loaded against the white Afrikaans speaker”.<sup>44</sup>

The official opening of the newly established university emphasised not only the power of knowledge, but also the importance of the Afrikaans language.<sup>45</sup> The use of Afrikaans, it was believed, would afford the Afrikaans discipline and subject specialist the opportunity to develop the language into a fully-fledged, legitimate scientific medium in which newly researched knowledge would be communicated. Afrikaans would not only be used to undertake research and communicate research findings, but it would also, in turn, be developed and refined.<sup>46</sup>

Mother-tongue education at RAU indirectly promoted Afrikaans as a scientific language and contributed to disciplines based on Christian values and closely related to the ideals of Christian-National Education (CNE), which the NP had officially promoted since 1948.<sup>47</sup> This would become

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41 UJ/RAU, *RAU-Rapport*, 8 June 1975, p. 2.

42 WAM Carstens and N Bosman, *Kontemporêre Afrikaanse taalkunde*, p. 53.

43 UJ library, *RAU-Rapport*, 8(3). 1975, pp. 1-2.

44 UJ library, *Gedenkalbum van die opening van die R.A.U.*, 24 February 1968, Speech of the Chancellor Dr N Diederichs, p. 20.

45 UJ library, *Gedenkalbum van die opening van die R.A.U.*, 24 February 24, Speech by Prof G van N Viljoen – Welcoming of the parents of the students, p. 51.

46 FIJ van Rensburg, “Sy visie vir die nuwe universiteit”, B Louw and F van Rensburg, *Bestendige binnevuur: Perspektiewe op Gerrit Viljoen by geleentheid van sy een en sewentigste verjaarsdag op 11 September 1997* (Kapaad, Tafelberg-uitgewers Beperk, 1997), p. 47.

47 R Davies, *Afrikaner in the New South Africa; identity politics in a global economy* (London, 2009), p. 23.

another factor determining RAU's founding, promoting a mother-tongue education based on Christian nationalist values to preserve what already existed but also to create, form and expand the Afrikaans culture, language and philosophy of life.<sup>48</sup> Closely related to this was tailoring teaching syllabi in the fields of anthropology, sociology, education and history to cater for the distinctive needs of the Christian-Nationalist ideology.<sup>49</sup>

The knowledge obtained in Afrikaans at RAU, especially thorough research and subsequent teaching, would create an environment for the scientific development of the language. This would assist the white Afrikaans students in understanding the modern world in which they found themselves.<sup>50</sup> The university furthermore had to assist white Afrikaans speakers to actively become part of commercial and professional urban prosperity.<sup>51</sup> For this reason Diederichs, during the opening of the new administrative office and lecture complex of RAU on 24 May 1975, stated that the founding of the new university would represent the true arrival of white Afrikaans speakers on the Witwatersrand and that it would symbolise the true advancement and identity formation of white Afrikaans speakers.<sup>52</sup> It had to be a university that would provide high standards of scientific endeavour, focus on the importance of character formation, and emphasise an inclination to service, idealism and a deep Christian commitment, as well as on the provision of a service to the white Afrikaans-speaking group as well as to the entire country.<sup>53</sup> It would promote the language and culture of white Afrikaans speakers.<sup>54</sup>

Mother-tongue education would play a pivotal role in the achievement of these goals but, according to the founders, all this had to occur within the context of Biblical Christian values.<sup>55</sup>

## Christian educational values and RAU

At RAU the instilling of Christian nationalist values were viewed as very

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48 UJ/RAU, G van N Viljoen collection, File C3/1, Die uitdaging van 'n nuwe universiteit, p. 1.

49 S Dubow, *A commonwealth of knowledge: Science, sensibility and white South Africa, 1820-2000* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 266.

50 Fij Van Rensburg, "Sy visie vir die nuwe universiteit", B Louw and F van Rensburg, *Bestendige binnevuur*, p. 47.

51 MA Beale, "Apartheid and university education, 1948-1970" (PhD, University of the Witwatersrand, 1998), p. 8.

52 UJ library, *Gedenkalbum van die opening van die R.A.U.*, 24 February 1968, Speech of the Chancellor, Dr N Diederichs, p. 20.

53 UJ library, *RAU-Rapport*, 8(2), 1975, p. 2.

54 UJ/RAU, PJ Meyer collection, File C1/1, Die Beplanning van die Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit, pp. 5-6.

55 JN Klee, "The establishment of the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) 1955-1968: A centerpiece in education of modernising Afrikaner livelihood" (PhD University of the North-West, 2017) p. 139.

important. In his article, "Christian National Education (CNE)", Macmillan sketches the broad historical background of this educational design. In his opinion, the ideas of Christian National Education originated in the Cape Colony during the 1800s in reaction to Anglicisation. It was further boosted after the South African War when the Dutch/Afrikaans-speaking people of the former Boer Republics feared the loss of their identity through the deprivation of their language and nationality.<sup>56</sup> In this regard, the CNE made its mark. The need for CNE in the arena of nationalist education had a long history that grew out of the deep needs of a white Afrikaans-speaking community who had experienced defeat, shame and oppression. CNE furthermore enhanced the Christian and national character of the (Afrikaner) nation and cemented its belief in promoting the idea of one country, one nation, one culture, one history and one language.<sup>57</sup>

Research into CNE reveals a long history marked by debate and criticism. However, this turbulent history will not be the focus of discussion here. Instead, it explores the origins of the belief that an education system based on religious principles was necessary to safeguard white Afrikaans speakers in South Africa in terms of language, religion, culture and history. It is in this context that attention will be focused on the goals of instilling Christian nationalist values<sup>58</sup> in higher education (with the emphasis on RAU), based on the principles of CNE.

### ***CNE and RAU***

The development and implementation of the CNE model emerged once white Afrikaans-speaking leaders in political and cultural organisations articulated the view that their Protestantism and nationalism were under threat from 'foreign' influences, specifically liberalism.<sup>59</sup> Liberalism, it was believed, could have a negative effect on the *volk*, government, science, academic freedom, religion and language because it was believed that liberalist views did not always reflect that of biblical views.<sup>60</sup> CNE was conceptualised to counteract this negative influence. It was in this context that the Federasie vir Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniging (FAK) (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Societies) held

56 RG Macmillan, "Christian National Education", *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 28, 1967, p. 43; ES van Eeden & LM Vermeulen, Christian National Education (CNE) and people's education (PE): Historical perspectives and some broad common grounds, *New Contree*, 55, 2005, pp. 177-205.

57 RG Macmillan, "Christian National Education", *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 28, 1967, p. 44.

58 This Christian values would be based on the Calvinist strand (NGK) of Christian Nationalism.

59 HFA, File, AB 12/91-3/1/1, AB: Grondslag van ons strewe – Christelik Nasionaal, p. 1.

60 INEG, PJ Meyer collection, File AB 12/223, Boks 3/1/7, Weerbaarheid: Die wese en vrug van liberalisme, pp. 1-9.

a conference in 1939, called the Christian-National Educational conference (*Volkskongres*). The intention was to establish a body that would embody the ideals of CNE. This body would become known as the Institute for Christian-National Education.<sup>61</sup>

Influential individuals such as Van Rooy, Chairman of the FAK in the 1940s, Prof JG Meiring, superintendent-general of education in the 1950s and Dr TE Dönges, the minister of finance in the 1960s, believed that CNE was necessary and consequently supported the CNE manifesto of 1948.<sup>62</sup> Some white Afrikaans-speaking academics, like Prof J Coetzee, concluded that only one type of university existed at the start of the twentieth century in South Africa, namely the liberal university. He strongly believed that this state of affairs needed to change. According to Coetzee, liberal universities consisted of a grouping of people who did not share a common belief and life orientation, and who adopted a non-Christian approach to teaching and learning (these liberal universities would however claim that they adopted a secular approach). He advocated that white Afrikaans-speaking parents who wanted to send their children to university could not tolerate this non-Christian approach; it would negatively affect their values and beliefs, and would inevitably have a negative effect on their religious and cultural development.<sup>63</sup>

The perception that the Protestantism and nationalism of white Afrikaans speakers were under threat of weakening and being changed resulted in the CNE being supported and implemented across a broad spectrum of the South African education landscape since the mid-nineteenth century, and extended during the early and middle twentieth century, particularly after 1948. Inevitably, a CNE system was implemented at provincial level after 1954 and countrywide from 1967 after parliament approved the national education legislation on CNE.<sup>64</sup>

This educational model, based on Christian nationalist values,<sup>65</sup> was believed to be the only system in which the white Afrikaans speaker could be protected against perceived forces to destroy their language, religion, culture and history. This explains why, according to Macmillan, the educational approach had to

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61 CM Tatz, Apartheid: Battle for the mind, *The Australian Quarterly*, 33(2), 1961, p. 1.

62 D Lavin, The dilemma of Christian-National education in South Africa, *The World Today*, 21(10), 1965, p. 430.

63 UJ/RAU, JBZ Louw collection, File A 128/5, Die Christelike Universiteit, p. 196.

64 HFA, File, AB 12/91-3/1/1, AB: Grondslag van ons strewe – Christelik Nationaal, p. 2.

65 Christian values referred to values based on the teachings of the Bible. This is extended to the teachings of Jesus and the Christians through the history of the religion.

be promoted as a model to mould the individual into a strong opponent of “alien influences”. Exposure to this model was believed to be important for white Afrikaans speakers. They had to be well-equipped to deal with everyday life and, most importantly, to develop the Christian and envisioned national character.<sup>66</sup> This ideal aim, with its origins in the 1940s, was reaffirmed in a document by the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB) entitled *Grondslag van ons strewe – Christelik Nasionaal* (Basis of our aspirations – Christian National) that was drafted in May 1972. In view of this document, the model had to be further developed and implemented to protect white Afrikaans speakers.<sup>67</sup>

It is in this context that the general use of the CNE principles became instrumental in uplifting and unifying the white Afrikaans-speaking group, who would in future, be privileged to study at a tertiary institution such as RAU, undergirded by biblical and CNE principles. From the outset, it was clear that RAU had to be Christian in nature and that the institution had to assist in developing the Christian national character of the nation. Although RAU was created to be mainly exclusive in terms of the group for which it was intended, based on its specific linguistic and religious foundations this however interestingly enough, did not imply that other cultural groupings would be prevented from becoming part of the RAU community. Prof G van N Viljoen (First rector of RAU) made it clear on various occasions that it was important that RAU would have to function across cultural and racial divides in an effort not only to learn from others, but to make sure that others learned from RAU and from what the institution stood for.<sup>68</sup> RAU would therefore be an institution where other cultures would be welcome, as long as they were willing to associate themselves with the Afrikaans culture, language and religion.<sup>69</sup> This exclusive character in terms of religious orientation was adopted not to exclude, but also to include those who had different religious orientations. Although the exclusive character remained intact, those who had different religious orientations were included to extend the specific beliefs that RAU supported.<sup>70</sup>

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66 RG Macmillan, “Christian National Education”, *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 28, 1967, p. 44.

67 HFA, File, AB 12/91-3/1/1, AB: *Grondslag van ons strewe – Christelik Nasionaal*, p. 2.

68 JC Garbers, “Diens deur kennis”, B Louw and F van Rensburg, *Bestendige binnevuur*, pp. 81-82.

69 FIJ van Rensburg, “Sy visie vir die nuwe universiteit”, B Louw and F van Rensburg, *Bestendige binnevuur*, pp. 47-48.

70 UJ library, *Gedenkalbum van die opening van die R.A.U.*, 24 February 1968, Speech of Prof G van N Viljoen welcoming the first students, p. 50.

As Viljoen explained, this goal was made practicable through the decision to exclude the “conscience clause” from RAU’s university legislation.<sup>71</sup> All universities in South Africa at that time, excluding the then Potchefstroom University (now North-West University), functioned in accordance with the statutes that stipulated the university would abstain from enquiring into the religious orientation of any person who applied for employment or who wished to study at the institution.<sup>72</sup> The exclusion of this clause in effect guaranteed that non-Christian students would not be discriminated against studying at the university, and that non-Christians who applied to be appointed as staff members would not be discriminated against on the basis of their religious beliefs.<sup>73</sup>

Viljoen gave the assurance that RAU would consider any person who applied for employment or study based on his or her academic and administrative qualifications. It was to be a university that subscribed to Christian religious principles as described in its constitution and in line with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. RAU would accept everybody who accepted the Christian faith and what RAU stood for in this regard. Furthermore, the university would not allow the persecution of non-Christians.<sup>74</sup>

### **Arguing over a *Conscience Clause***

Some however believed that the exclusion of the conscience clause in the university legislation could in effect mean that RAU would be able to refuse to admit non-Christian students or that it would not appoint non-Christian staff. The fact was that the new proposed clause, borrowed from the South African Constitution, implied that only Christian students and staff would be welcome at the university.<sup>75</sup> The acceptance of Christian values by those who wanted to work or study would therefore determine if they were welcome in the university or not. This immediately resulted in criticism from outsiders and even from fellow white Afrikaans speakers. They feared the university would be so exclusive that it would only admit staff and students who believed in what the authorities believed in. The editor of *The Star*, for example, concluded that the founders of RAU were not only criticised for not allowing religious freedom, but also for not allowing freedom from religious persecution. He

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71 PJ Meyer, *Nog nie ver genoeg nie: 'n Persoonlike rekenskap van vyftig jaar georganiseerde Afrikanerskap* (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1984), p. 172.

72 UJ library, *Gedenkalbum van die opening van die R.A.U.*, 24 February 1968, Speech of Prof G van N Viljoen, p. 49.

73 PJ Meyer, *Nog nie ver genoeg nie...*, p. 172.

74 UJ library, *Gedenkalbum van die opening van die R.A.U.*, 24 February 1968, Speech of Prof G van N Viljoen, p. 50.

75 UJ/RAU, P M S von Staden collection: File C2/12/2/2: Correspondence – Mr D Malan and Dr P J Meyer – 11 August 1966.



obviously exaggerated this point in order to show how important, in his view, the issue was.<sup>76</sup> Among white Afrikaans speakers, especially members of the “Nederduitse Gereformeerde” (Dutch Reformed) Church (NGK), criticism to the effect that the decision of the founders of RAU not to include a conscience clause in the university’s statute, was the direct result of their unwillingness to take a stand for a purely Christian orientation at RAU.<sup>77</sup>

The exclusion of the conscience clause and its replacement with a new clause based on the South African constitution revealed the following in relation to the impact of the CNE ideology on RAU: firstly, it implied that only those who subscribed to the Constitution of the Republic would be welcome at RAU. However, even though this point of view highlighted RAU’s exclusive character, people of different religious orientations would not be excluded, provided they understood that RAU functioned in accordance with Christian values and a Christian way of life. Secondly, it reflected the profound influence of CNE thought on the philosophical and ideological vision of the university.

The CNE model with specific reference to Article II of the manifesto furthermore focused on university training. In the case of RAU this provided a clear and specific guideline in teaching and approach. From the outset, it clearly emphasised that teaching content needed to be scientific, although founded on the Christian faith. Important, was that specific attention had to be given to the teaching and practice of Christian doctrine and philosophy. It was, in addition, made clear that university instruction should be ‘thetic rather than antithetic, never purely eclectic and never reconciliatory’. The teaching of science had to be expounded in a positive Christian light and had to be contrasted with the non-Christian sciences. It was also important to ensure that the right staff members were employed, lecturers who were staunchly Christian nationalist scientists.<sup>78</sup>

It can thus be concluded that the general use of CNE principles became instrumental not only in protecting but also in unifying the white Afrikaans-speaking group who would in future, be privileged to study at a tertiary institution, RAU, undergirded by biblical and CNE principles. From the outset, it was clear that RAU had to be Christian Calvinist in nature and that the institution had to assist in developing the Christian national character

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<sup>76</sup> *The Star*, 11 August 1966.

<sup>77</sup> UJ/RAU, RAU Establishment history: File A11/1: Correspondence – Mr WB Jansen, Dr PJ Meyer – 11 October 1966.

<sup>78</sup> D Lavin, “The dilemma of Christian-National education in South Africa”, *The World Today*, 21(10), 1965, p. 341.

of the nation.<sup>79</sup> This aspect of RAU, in addition to its modern architectural symbolism, had to help the institution realise its goal to display something of the greatness of God and the Christian faith.<sup>80</sup>

RAU's philosophical vision and mission had as its main goal the moulding of white Afrikaans-speaking students firmly based on Christian values. This would be achieved via mother-tongue education and new and modern teaching methods and systems.<sup>81</sup> RAU therefore had to use its academic and scientific programmes to nurture white Afrikaans culture and language in a Christian nationalist environment. It would be with an university in Afrikaans spirit and culture where the principles contained in the Constitution would be upheld in all academic and scientific programmes and endeavours.<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusion

In this article it has been argued that RAU's implementation of mother-tongue education which was Afrikaans, and based on Christian values, was perceived by the founders as crucially important for mobilising and empowering white Afrikaners and so fostering Afrikaner nationalism. The founding of RAU was based on two important elements: Education in students' mother tongue and instilling of Christian values. Here the principles of CNE made their mark. The need for CNE in the arena of nationalist education had a long history: the CNE model was developed and implemented because of the belief of white Afrikaans-speaking leaders in political and cultural organisations that their Protestantism and nationalism were under threat, particularly from liberalism.<sup>83</sup> CNE was believed to be necessary for counteracting these perceived negative influences.

Mother-tongue education and Christian values were an integral part of RAU's establishment and facilitated promotion of the university's Afrikaans spirit and character. Furthermore, the article has revealed RAU's aim to develop white Afrikaans-speaking identity via the use of language and Christian values. This had to not only serve as a shield against liberalism, but also had to provide an environment in which a modern Afrikaans identity could be sculpted. The close relationship between language and identity formation paved the way for

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79 D Lavin, "The dilemma of Christian-National education in South Africa", *The World Today*, 21(10), 1965, p. 431.

80 UJ library, *Gedenkalbum van die opening van die R.A.U.*, 24 February 1968, Speech by Prof G van N Viljoen, p. 50.

81 UJ library, *Gedenkalbum van die opening van die R.A.U.*, 24 February 1968, Chancellor's speech by Dr N Diederichs, p. 19.

82 FIJ van Rensburg, "Sy visie vir die nuwe universiteit", B Louw and F van Rensburg, *Bestendige binnevuur*, p. 46.

83 HFA, File, AB 12/91-3/1/1, AB: Grondslag van ons strewende – Christelik Nasionaal, p. 1.

social control, which played an important role in RAU by forming part of the NP's notion of the "particularism" of universities, as Beale noted.<sup>84</sup> This meant that an ethnic definition of the university was formulated and formalised: the university had to be closely related to the community in which it was located and which it would serve. RAU would therefore embody a *volksuniversiteit*,<sup>85</sup> catering for the *volk* in the language of the *volk* to develop a modern identity for the *volk*. RAU thus served as an example of how a specific population group in its specific society endeavoured to initiate and fulfil functions vitally important for its survival.

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84 MA Beale, "Apartheid goals in the 1960s..." (Seminar paper delivered at the University of the Witwatersrand on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1995), p. 8.

85 MA Beale, "Apartheid and university education, 1948-1970" (PhD, University of the Witwatersrand, 1998), p. 8.