

Christine Boshuizen-van Burken & Darek M. Haftor (Eds) ~ Reason, Faith And Practice In Our Common Home - Festschrift for Dr. Sytse Strijbos ~ Introduction



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Introduction

This book is devoted to Dr. Sytse Strijbos, in our appreciation of his unique, devoted, and selfless efforts and contributions to the betterment of the world we live in.

The present age, often understood as either late modernity or postmodernity, seems to have manifested a developmental paradox. The invention and use of science and technologies has brought material well-being never experienced in human history. Much of the modern world is characterized by economic growth and reflected in advanced housing, schools, healthcare systems, transportation and communication infrastructure, safe and secure workplaces, social insurances of various types, pharmaceuticals that save the lives of millions—all bringing human comfort and fueling a consumption economy. Normatively regarded, however, there seems to be a blurred image. The development of societal

institutions, based on some form of democratic rationality, is important in its striving for human equality and participation as well as the elimination of coercions and oppressions.

Yet, we witness constant news about social, religious, political, and economic polarizations, with terrorist attacks and local wars killing innocent civilians, with global warming effects and microplastics in the oceans, with so-called “alternative truths” and challenges democratic institutions, including at its very heart the elections. More people than ever are consuming antidepressant pharmaceuticals and committing suicide. This imbalance between material development and normative advancement can be understood as the paradox of modernity and was brought to the surface eloquently by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in their seminal “Dialektik der Aufklärung” (Eng. “Dialectic of Enlightenment”). They challenge the myth of enlightenment and its progress, based solely on human reason, as reflected in rational bureaucratic organizations, science, and technology.

Raised in Dutch society during the World War II recovery effort, Strijbos is part of this paradox of modernity. He has witnessed the economic and material developments of his country and Europe, and the normative challenges of their societies. Strijbos has been exposed to several influences: a version of the Christian faith that promotes love and compassion, the power of intellect in science and technology, and the importance of action in entrepreneurship and businesses. Unlike most engaged people, he does not assume a stand for one of these three poles. Drawing on the intellectual tradition of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd, he seeks and formulates an integrative vision and approach that can be characterized in terms of three poles, where each pole interacts with the other two and in that manner aims toward human dignity and justice. His message is that only in that manner can we firstly understand the roots of modernity and its paradox and then redirect our societies.

Strijbos characterizes this integrative approach as disclosure, understood as “a process in which norms take shape that do justice to human life and society in its diversity. Disclosure accordingly goes together with recognition of the distinctive character and intrinsic normativity of the various terrains of life.” This concept is founded on the view that “human actions and interventions must be a positive response to a normative order that is itself anchored in the world.” [1]

Over nearly three decades, after changing his career from developing new

technologies through advanced applied research at Philips laboratories into an academic career based at the Department of Philosophy at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Strijbos' integrative visions and approach are manifested in his unique leadership. While occupied with his devotion to family life and university lecturing, he has managed to conceive of, initiate, establish, and govern several independent organizations (e.g., "the Centre for Technology and Social Systems" and "International Institute for Development and Ethics")

that aim to advance this integrative vision. The uniqueness of these efforts is that without any granted external resources, he motivates people in various parts of the world (e.g., the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (UK), Sweden, and South Africa) to pursue intellectual and practical activities also aimed at advancing this integrative vision, where attempts are made to relate faith and conviction to thinking and intellect, and to actions and practices. These efforts have formulated tentative bridges of several kinds. One kind is in the academia among the various specialized disciplines, typically isolated from each other, and with philosophy and theology. The other kind of bridges are between the academic world of thinking and the world of practices and actions, be it firms, entrepreneurship, hospitals, or aid agencies.

In the course of three decades, Sytse Strijbos has provided organizational and intellectual leadership that has contributed uniquely to the development of young people and scholars, several of which are today full professors and a university rector. In this book, students and colleagues of Strijbos have taken time to author a text with a message that in one way or another relates to the integrative vision proposed by Strijbos. These contributions are diverse, which only reflects the multidisciplinary impact of Strijbos' work and efforts and one of its underlying messages: the root cause of modernity and its paradox can neither be understood in terms of one or a few aspects only, nor in terms of the assumptions held by modernity. Rather, an integrated view is needed where faith should be related to thinking and science, which must be related to actions and practices - any separated approach is deemed to produce a partial diagnosis and thus a faulty remedy. Therefore, the title of this Festschrift that celebrates Sytse Strijbos is *"Reason, Faith and Practice in Our Common Home."*

Thank you, Sytse!

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Christine Boshuijzen-van Burken, The Netherlands

Darek M. Haftor, Sweden

NOTES

[1] Both from: Strijbos, S. (2003). Systems Thinking and the Disclosure of a technological Society: Some Philosophical reflections. Systems Research and Behavioral Science, 20, 119-131. (p.128)

[2] The editors are grateful for the contributions of Harma Strijbos and dr. Carols Reinecke who provided many details about Strijbos' life and career.

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philips_Natuurkundig_Laboratorium

[4] Some data can be found in manuals on ceramic technology: R.J. Brook (ed.) Concise Encyclopedia of Advanced Ceramic Materials, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1991, page 113-117 and page 383-384. And also in: M.N. Rahaman, Ceramic Processing, Taylor & Francis, London/New York, 2007.