



L.J. Dorsman, P.J. Knegtmans (eds.), *Theologie, waarheidsliefde en religiekritiek. Over geloof en wetenschap aan de Nederlandse universiteiten sedert 1815* (Universiteit & Samenleving 12; Hilversum: Verloren, 2014, 120 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 471 8).

A series of lectures for a conference in Utrecht in 2013 has been adapted for presentation to the wider public in the present volume. Though the assumed connection between ‘truthfulness’ and religious criticism begs more explanation than is offered in the very short introduction of just two pages, the focus is clearly on the perception of faith and science in Dutch universities since 1815. The relevance of the subject-matter is not in doubt. As Sijbolt Noorda puts it, present-day academic theology finds itself in the unenviable position of a simultaneous loss of students (numbers dropped from 2300 in 1980 to a mere 484 in 2012) and decline of academic self-evidence. Given the pivotal position of theology in Dutch intellectual life during the Republic and even during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it may be assumed that historians will read these collected essays with interest.

The over-all framework looks rather traditional. As the title shows, theology comes in first, as if it is still in the centre of academic discourse. A justification of this sequence is provided in the essay by Rik Peels. In his opinion, theology should stick to its core-business from times immemorial: a well-considered discourse on God, based on firm conviction that this is possible by means of conceptual analysis and argumentation. Leen Dorsman introduces the reader to the opposite sequence, in which science comes first and in which the intelligible world can only be ascertained by accepted scientific means. For Abraham Kuenen (1828-1891) this means that theology should bow to sound external evidence when it comes to textual criticism of the Bible. Statements on God belong to the cultural evolution of mankind, and should be analysed as such – at least in an academic setting. It may be regretted by the reader that Dorsman limits his exposition to Kuenen’s days, without confronting Peels on this point. Erik Borgman offers an illuminating survey of what such grandees as sociologist Max Weber, St. Thomas Aquinas and cardinal John Henry Newman have to say on faith and religion, but fails to show how their insights were related to the academic stratification of Dutch theology between 1815 and the present.

The survey of these developments since 1980, by Noorda, is a fine piece – up to date and well-structured. The volume would have benefited greatly by an extension of Noorda's contribution to the entire time-span that the book is supposed to cover. Ab Flipse offers a welcome perspective from the VU University, established on 'Reformed principles' by Abraham Kuyper in 1880. Flipse pays due attention to the notion of commitment to the needs of contemporary society, and to the way in which Calvinist heritage (itself so closely related to theology) might contribute to fuelling that commitment. At times, he strays rather far from the subject at hand: notably in a lengthy paragraph on the attractions of the Communist Party in the Netherlands for students of the VU University during the seventies. Last in line is Wouter Marchant, on government grants for theological students between 1815 and 1918. The editors have refrained from adding a concluding paragraph.

Despite a generally high quality of the contributions, coherence between them remains rather loose throughout the entire book. When it comes to science and religion in Dutch universities between 1815 and 2013, the result is fragmentary at best. Many of those who are reading theology at a Dutch university in 2015 belong either to the orthodox wings of Roman-Catholicism or Protestantism, or feel attracted to an Evangelicalism that is more indebted to Puritan roots in Anglo-Saxon Christianity than to traditions in the Netherlands. This affinity seems to have been unduly underplayed. Another curious omission is the lack of attention to professional prospects in the labour market, for those who have successfully concluded an academic study of theology. Even so, in questions of detail, a lot can be learnt from the present anthology. For *BMGN-Low Countries Historical Review*-readers with an interest in contemporary history the contributions by Noorda and Flipse are especially commendable.

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