

Ab Flipse, *Christelijke wetenschap: Nederlandse rooms-katholieken en gereformeerden over de natuurwetenschap, 1880-1940*. 327 pp., illus., bibl., index. Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2014. € 29 (paper).

*Christian Scholarship* explores the rise and fall of the ideal of Christian science among Dutch neocalvinists and neothomists between 1880 and 1940. Troubled by the naturalistic and progressivistic tendencies in the liberal protestant ideal of scholarship of around 1900, they aimed to incorporate two manifestations of divine providence – purpose and organic unity – in science. Further, they took calls for holism to replace mechanicism in biology as well as the development of relativity and quantum physics as an opening of science towards religion.

Flipse interprets neocalvinist and neothomist opposition to liberal protestantism as part of a range of responses to the modernization of Dutch society around the turn of the nineteenth century. This included science. Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), a leading theologian and politician unified these responses. His vision originated in a conversion from the theological modernism in which he was educated at the university of Leiden. Following Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876), a leader of the Second Great Awakening in The Netherlands, Kuyper outlined a unified Christian worldview in opposition to the rationalism and naturalism of the Enlightenment that he perceived in theological modernism. Kuyper and followers recognized the God-given contributions to science by non-Christians. Nuance characterized their response to all aspects of modernisation including science. For instance, biological evolution as a God-guided process was acceptable, but evolutionism as an ideology was rejected as a manifestation of Enlightenment naturalism.

Further, neothomists and neocalvinists shared the notion of organic unity. It existed among the books of scripture, the scientific disciplines and between faith and science. Organic unity explains their rejection of conflict as characteristic of science and religion, of the abuse of science in support of ideologies such as materialism and mechanicism, of deistic forms of mechanicism as a philosophy of organism, and of Darwinism because of its perceived rejection of goal-directed phenomena which Christians saw as a rejection of divine providence in nature.

In the end the ideal of Christian science failed. As Flipse observes, it made no difference in the practice of science and this for three reasons. First, neocalvinists and neothomists failed to articulate how Christian beliefs relate to science. Second, the neocalvinists disagreed on a philosophy that could mediate between faith and science. Third, both failed to articulate how the scriptures relate to science. Following an ecclesiastical trial of a pastor over the historicity of the Genesis narrative in 1926, neocalvinist scientists and theologians parted ways when the theologians and a couple of scientists adopted the flood geology of George McCready Price. Here some questions remain unanswered. Was this a convenient move to give scientific credence to a pre-existing literalism? Why were they stricter in their interpretation of scripture than their teachers Kuyper and Bavinck? Was this a reaction to the trial or a pre-existing literalism that shaped this reaction?

Flipse concludes that both neothomists and neocalvinists misinterpreted the reorientation in the European scholarly community towards holism as a new openness toward religion. One might add that a recognition of the difference between organic and inorganic phenomena and the ensuing opposition to reductionism and mechanicism are not uniquely Christian positions. This rejection of mechanicism in favour of teleology seems puzzling at first. Centuries earlier scholars had adopted the machine view of the universe because it incorporated the purposes of the divine

Creator. But, Flipse explains, before and during the eighteenth century the machine metaphor came to signify distance between creation and Creator. This associated mechanism with deism and its criticism of the teachings of Christianity such as limited atonement. Thus the objection was against both the distancing of God from the world and the criticism of traditional Christian teaching.

Strengths include the period treated (1880-1940), the broad range of topics supported by a systematic review of many articles in journals and yearbooks, the comparison of neocalvinist, neothomist and liberal protestant ideals of scholarship, and the analysis of how these ideals were received and applied by practising scientists in neocalvinist and neothomist traditions. In an epilogue, Flipse observes that in The Netherlands after 1926 the ideal of Christian scholarship continued much diminished in smaller Calvinist denominations. However, I might add, before the ideal died Dutch immigrants imported it to North America. There it shaped the history of Christian liberal arts colleges and today's revival of neo-Calvinism and its ideal of Christian scholarship. Flipse has written a fascinating and well-rounded study of the uniquely Dutch circumstances that shaped the history of science and religion in ways that differ from other European countries between 1880 and 1940.

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