

**Ab Flipse \***

## **Science, religion and emancipation: Dutch Calvinist and Roman-Catholic responses to modernity in the early 20th century**

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY orthodox-Calvinists and Roman-Catholics in the Netherlands contributed little to the sciences. At the end of the century a process of emancipation started, which was mainly realized by means of the founding of private, denominational, organizations. In 1880 the Calvinists founded their own university; in 1923 the Roman-Catholics followed this example. Starting with Theology, Law and Arts, the eventual aim of these universities was to also set up an alternative, theistic science, standing beside and opposite to the existing science, which was often associated with materialism and even atheism. In the meantime also a growing number of Calvinist and Roman-catholic students studied at one of the State universities. They too strove for an increased participation of their co-religionists in science and they formed organizations with their fellow-believer scientists; in 1896 a 'Calvinist society for Christian scientists and physicians', and in 1904 a Roman-catholic equal were founded. Despite a relative isolation (in private universities and scientific societies) and a frequent criticism of the naturalistic science, an elaborate, Christian alternative to the existing science did not emerge.

This paper focuses on the circulation of knowledge between the domain of science and the domain of religion. Scientific knowledge was transferred through religious groups, which tried to participate in modern culture and simultaneously tried to preserve their distinctive identity. This identity was, however, also influenced by the interaction with science. It appears that these groups succeeded in their emancipation by means of conforming themselves to a large extent to the prevailing (scientific) standards. In this paper Calvinist and Catholic responses to modernity are compared: What were the similarities and differences in the processes that in both cases led to emancipation? What factors determined these processes? Can a specific influence of the religious contexts be pointed out?

---

\* Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Department of History and Social Aspects of Science, Amsterdam, The Netherlands: email: [AC.Flipse@few.vu.nl](mailto:AC.Flipse@few.vu.nl).