Philosophy of Religion in the Benelux

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1. *Luxemburg*

Luxemburg has no university. As a result, those who have a professional interest in philosophy are obliged to make their academic career elsewhere. In this connection, the name of Jean Greisch (1942-), by now professor at the *Institut Catholique* in Paris, might be mentioned here. A very productive author, Greisch is influenced by many present-day continental philosophers (a.o. Gadamer, Ricoeur, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida). He has a special interest in hermeneutics, and applies post-modern hermeneutic theories to the reading of religious texts. These texts don't have one fixed meaning, but are involved in an on-going process of interpretation. Thus, from the perspective of the religious believer, inspiration and revelation should also be seen as ever on-going rather than as past events.[1]

2. *Belgium*[2]

1) *General situation*: With regard to Belgium we are in the happy situation that the history and the actuality of its philosophical life has been meticulously described in an eight-volume work of C.E.M. Struyker Boudier. In fact, Struyker Boudier's encyclopedic survey covers the philosophical work that has been done not only in Belgium but also in the Netherlands and

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[1] Cf. Jean Greisch, *L'Age herméneutique de la Raison* (Paris 1985); cf. on Greisch C.E.M. Struyker Boudier, *Op zoek naar zin en zijn* (Wijsgerig leven in Nederland, België en Luxemburg VII) (Nijmegen 1992), 352-354.

[2] I am indebted to Prof. W.A. de Pater and Prof. I. Verhack for their kind verbal information on the backgrounds of philosophy of religion in Belgium. I also thank Prof. de Pater for commenting on an earlier version of the Belgium-section of this paper.

Luxemburg from 1880 until 1990 by thousands of scholars, with up to now only one restriction: it focuses exclusively on the Roman Catholic world.[3] As a result, it gives a more complete description of philosophy in Belgium than in the Netherlands, since in the Netherlands catholicism has been only one of the dominant confessional forces.

Since more than a century an essential role in Belgian philosophical life is played by the Institute for Philosophy[4] in Louvain (Leuven). This academic institute, erected in 1889 on papal instructions by the universal scholar and later Cardinal Désiré Mercier (1851-1926), was the centre of the neo-thomistic revival in the low countries. In the course of time it developed into the most important centre for the Belgian study of philosophy in general. Its many professors and lecturers teach at all faculties of Louvain University. Still keeping its broadly catholic orientation, it provides room for the study of many modern and post-modern philosophers of both continental and analytical traditions. There is a rather strong accent on descriptive and historical studies. In general, the Benelux has functioned more as a centre of import and export, reception and development, of philosophical theories from abroad than as a breeding-place of original philosophical genius. Nevertheless, the study of present-day French, German, and more recently also Anglo-American philosophers at the Institute is also turned to use for the elaboration of creative and original philosophical contributions. For many years the Institute has been attracting students and scholars from many countries for research and teaching purposes.

As for the philosophy of religion, this was not recognized in Belgium as a separate subject until the nineteen twenties.[5] This was caused by the fact that philosophy of religion was seen as a secular and therefore unwelcome alternative to natural or philosophical theology, a discipline which was

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[3] The title of the series is *Wijsgerig leven in Nederland en België 1880-1980*; on some volumes, the name of Luxemburg is also added. The eight volumes appeared from 1985-1992 in Leuven, Nijmegen and Baarn. In the last volume, *Katholieken en hun filosofie* (Nijmegen 1992), 63, Struyker Boudier announces further studies on the philosophical work of protestant and non-confessional authors in the Benelux. In what follows on the philosophy of religion in Belgium, I have profited much from Struyker Boudier's books.

[4] *Institut supérieur de Philosophie/Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte*; from the twenties, the Dutch language was also used in teaching, and gradually became to play a more important role. The University of Louvain (1425) was re-erected in 1835 as a free catholic university. In 1968 it was split into a Dutch-speaking university in Flanders and a French-speaking one in Wallony (Louvain-la-Neuve). As a result, the Institute was also split into two sections.

[5] U. Dhondt, 'Filosofie en godsdienst', *Tijdschrift voor filosofie* (1991), 3-22.

firmly embedded in classical metaphysics. In the philosophy of religion, not God but religion is the central theme of reflection. But if the divine reality can only be grasped in the attitude of faith, how can (secular) philosophy judge in matters of meaning and truth in religion? This was the question the first professor for (among other things) philosophy of religion, Mgr. Léon Noël, asked. Noël was appointed at the theological faculty of Louvain University in 1921, and taught the subject besides his work at the Institute until 1942.[6]

Still, the philosophy of religion hardly has an independent academic status in Belgium. Many individual philosophers have been engaged in the study of religious themes, and have developed creative insights and theories in this connection; others directed their attention to the empirical study of concrete religions in order to draw apologetic conclusions about their truth and falsity in relation to the Catholic faith. Still more philosophers and theologians have been involved in the traditional project of offering philosophical/metaphysical grounds for belief in God (e.g. Dominicans like De Petter and Walgrave). They try to show in different ways that human existence is characterized by a transcendental openness towards God. But usually these different projects and activities are not considered as belonging to the discipline of 'philosophy of religion'. So the otherwise safe criterion that everything is philosophy of religion which presents itself as such does not yield much in this context. Nor has any approach established itself as a dominant tradition.

As to the protestant side (not covered by Struyker Boudier's survey), philosophy of religion has been part of the teaching programme in the only protestant theological faculty, which is based in Brussels, ever from its beginning.[7] Here we find a similar situation as in the Catholic institutions: philosophy of religion is usually assigned together with some three to five other disciplines to one professor. When he or she departs and is succeeded, the division of the teaching areas may be changed depending on the interests of the new staff. As a result, philosophy of religion has been practised only when people decided to concentrate in their research on this

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[6] Struyker Boudier, *De filosofie van Leuven* (Wijsgerig leven V) (Leuven 1989), 147-152 (esp. 149); id., *Katholieken en hun filosofie* (Wijsgerig leven VIII) (Nijmegen 1992), 93.

[7] The *Faculté universitaire de théologie protestante* was founded in 1950, its Dutch-speaking section, the *Universitaire faculteit voor protestantse godgeleerdheid* in 1954.

specific part of their task. So here too much depends on the creative inter-
est of individuals.

2) *Individual philosophers*: Without claiming completeness, I therefore
would like to mention some individual philosophers and theologians whose
work is interesting from the perspective of philosophy of religion. I start
in Louvain. Until recently, the philosophy of religion was officially taught
here by F.D. Vansina (1925), who has published mainly on the philosophy
of Paul Ricoeur[8]; at this moment it is taught by Ignace Verhack (1944). In
1975 Verhack wrote a dissertation on the mystical dimension in Wittgen-
stein's *Tractatus*[9], and in a number of later publications he opposes the
usurpation of religious belief by critical reason. Religious belief is a cat-
egory *sui generis*, and only if philosophy respects this fact it can fruitfully
reflect on religion. At this moment, Verhack is inspired by work of the
French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion, who separates God from the classical
concept of being. Influence of Wittgenstein is also visible in the work of
A. Burms and H. de Dijn. In their book on 'rationality and its limits' they
defend a non-cognitive interpretation of religion. Religion has to do with
the quest for meaning, and as such it has an irreplaceable function in cul-
ture and society. It does not, however, deal with knowledge of facts; it has
no propositional content, although in the end it may evoke a reality which
transcends our experience.[10]

Verhack's predecessor Antoine Vergote has become well-known most of
all as a psychologist of religion. Nevertheless, writing on the borderline of
psycho-analysis, cultural anthropology and philosophy, his many contribu-
tions on the nature and functions of religious belief, pertain to the philos-
ophy of religion as well. Over against the freudian reduction of religion to
a psychic complex, Vergote holds fast to an ontological dimension and to
the notion of truth in religion. The quest for God as reflected in religious
images, symbols and stories refers to our being addressed as human beings

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[8] But cf. his *Philosophy of Religion. Absence and Presence of God*, Leuven 1971, 1973[2];
according to Vansina, the mystery of being in the end has a personal character.

[9] Cf. his 'Wittgenstein's Deictic Metaphysics: An Uncommon Reading of the Tractatus',
International Philosophical Quarterly 28 (1978), 433-444.

[10] A. Burms & H. de Dijn, *De rationaliteit en haar grenzen: Kritiek en deconstructie*
(Leuven 1986); cf. the critical review of another professor for philosophy at the Institute,
Carlos Steel, 'Inzicht en zingeving', *Tijdschrift voor filosofie* 49 (1987), 297-307.

by the Other. The question is how to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy forms of religious belief. In this connection it is important that from an anthropological point of view we humans are eccentric rather than narcistic beings.

Classical problems concerning the relation between faith and reason have been dealt with by (among others) U. Dhondt, A. Léonard and M. Moors from the background of modern continental philosophy, especially from Kant and Hegel. In general, speculative philosophy from Aquinas to Hegel has been much more influential in Belgium than the analytic tradition. The most notable exception here is W.A. de Pater (1930-; in fact, De Pater is a Dutchman by birth), who combines his thomist orientation with an equally thorough acquaintance with British analytical philosophy. From 1968 until 1994 he was a professor at the Institute as well as at the Theological Faculty of Tilburg in the Netherlands (in 1970 the Tilburg chair was made extraordinary when he became an ordinary professor at the Institute). His many writings concentrate on logic, the philosophy of language and the philosophy of religion. More particularly, his main interest is in religious language. De Pater borrows the key notion of his thinking on this subject from Ian T. Ramsey, viz. the notion of 'disclosure'. According to Ramsey's thesis, religious language is rooted in disclosure-situations and seeks to evoke disclosures. It is not empirically, but evocatively descriptive. A disclosure is being st(r)uck by something, suddenly seeing its deeper meaning. Usually this happens by means of qualified models, i.e. by means of common sense images which are extended beyond their usual limits, and point towards a transcending reality. In this way, an (aha-)experience might be evoked of e.g. the real nature of God's might. For clearly from the standpoint of both scientific and everyday speech, religious language is a peculiar language with its own logic.[11] De Pater connects this theory with the thomistic doctrine of analogy, which gives his views a more realistic stamp than Ramsey's. Both are engaged, however, in the project of elucidating the linguistic and conceptual dimensions of religious belief. Remark-

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[11] W.A. de Pater, *Analogy, Disclosures and Narrative Theology* (Leuven 1988), 40-42; this is his most comprehensive English study of the theme, next to various Dutch and German contributions, of which especially *Reden von Gott: Reflexionen zur analytischen Philosophie der religiösen Sprache* (Bonn 1974, 1988²) should also be mentioned here. See for De Pater's view on the nature of philosophy of religion his 'Filosofie van de godsdienst', *Wijsgerig Perspectief* 13 (1972-1973), 348-352.

ably, up till now De Pater does not seem to have found many Belgian followers in this approach to philosophy of religion.

A second example of a philosopher who let himself be influenced by analytical philosophy and its theological applications is the Walloon Jean Ladrière (1921-). Apart from his numerous contributions on widely divergent branches of science and philosophy (mathematics, epistemology, social ethics, political theory etc.), Ladrière also wrote extensively on the place of the Christian faith in a scientific world. Following Wittgenstein and Donald Evans, he emphasized the performative character of the language of faith. In his work on religion he combined the new analytical insights with the spiritual dimensions of speculative philosophy. Thus, he incorporates in his thinking influences of philosophers such as Husserl, Hegel and Whitehead.[12]

The mentioning of Whitehead brings us to the figure of Jan van der Veken (1932-), who is no doubt Whiteheads most vigorous protagonist in Belgium if not in Europe.[13] Van der Veken is professor at the Institute for fundamental philosophy, epistemology and the philosophical doctrine of God (since 1969), director of the Institute's 'centre for metaphysics and the philosophical doctrine of God', and president of the *European Society for Process Thought*. Van der Veken regards process thought as a promising kind of metaphysics, because on the one hand it is not affected by the collapse of traditional onto-theology and on the other hand it provides us with a more realistic view of God than much continental philosophy (e.g. Levinas). As the dynamic ground (the 'final cause') of reality, God includes the universe in an organic way and lures it towards more harmony. Moreover, according to Van der Veken process metaphysics offers new chances for a fruitful dialogue between faith and science, theology and cosmology, because it is perfectly in line with modern physics.[14] Before his turn to process thinking, Van der Veken studied phenomenological philosophy (especially Merleau-Ponty), which he found to leave hardly any room for philosophical theology in the sense of rational talk about God.

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[12] Cf. J. Ladrière, *Language and Belief* (Dublin 1972).

[13] Cf. e.g. his 'Process Thought in Contemporary Europe: Belgium', *Process Studies* 9 (1979), 10-13; his *Proces-denken: Een oriëntatie* (Leuven 1983); and his translation of Whitehead's *Religion in the Making: De dynamiek van de religie* (Kapellen 1988).

[14] J. van der Veken, *Een kosmos om in te leven* (Kapellen 1990).

Finally, one protestant philosopher of religion should be mentioned: the Hungarian theologian Attila Szekeres, who taught the subject at the theological faculty of Brussels from 1954 until his death in 1974. Szekeres strived for what he called a theological philosophy of religion as distinct from a philosophical philosophy of religion. This theological philosophy of religion on the one hand has to do justice to the specific character and message of the Scriptures, and on the other hand has to take the independence of philosophy seriously. Because of this second requirement, a dialogue with philosophical philosophy of religion becomes possible and desirable; for both theology and philosophy remain fundamentally *human* enterprises, and neither the philosopher nor the theologian has a monopoly on truth.[15] There is some similarity between Szekeres' ideas on the nature and task of philosophy of religion and the Utrecht approach of the discipline as will be described below.

3. *The Netherlands*

1) *Historical developments*: Traditionally, the study of the philosophy of religion in the Netherlands has taken place at the theological faculties of the State Universities. The date of its official introduction at the by then three theological faculties (Leiden, Groningen, Utrecht) can be given with precision: 1 October 1877. In the previous year a Higher Education Act was accepted, which regulated the separation of state- and church-responsibilities in theological education. The act was the result of a growing insight during the preceding decades that the state should not and could not bear responsibility for the academic training of theologians of one particular church (viz. the broadly calvinist Dutch Reformed Church). Rather, as far as possible it should remain neutral and impartial in theological matters. Therefore, the state universities should not teach those subjects which are closely affiliated with the confessional perspective and practical needs of a particular church, such as dogmatics and practical theology. Despite discussions about changing the name of the theological faculty, it kept its

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[15] A. Szekeres, *De structuur van de filosofische theologie* (Den Haag 1961); cf. his 'Voor een eerherstel van de godsdienstwijsbegeerte' (= 'Plea for a rehabilitation of the philosophy of religion'), in: A. Szekeres, *Heil en elan* (Amsterdam 1974), 91-105; Szekeres also wrote appreciative articles on Karl Barth's view of philosophy of religion, but it seems that he himself was more influenced by Emil Brunner, on whom he wrote his dissertation.

traditional name ('faculteit der godgeleerdheid'); in practice, however, it became restyled as a department of religious studies, with special attention to the Christian religion.[16]

In this connection, a change in the curriculum of the restyled faculties meant the birth of philosophy of religion as an academic discipline: the subject of natural theology was transformed into two disciplines, viz. the history of the doctrine of God (which to my knowledge did not survive anywhere as a separate discipline) and the philosophy of religion. The latter was supposed to replace the systematic aspect of natural theology, and to conform to the academic standards of critical reasoning. The responsibility for the training of church ministers was in turn bestowed on the various churches; they were invited to appoint their own professors for so-called 'confessional' subjects like dogmatics and practical theology, who came to work next to the state professors at the different faculties. Since 1876 the state and different churches closely cooperate in this *duplex ordo*, as it is officially called.

Apart from the public universities (by now four in number, Amsterdam's *Athenaeum* having been made a municipal university in 1877), philosophy of religion is also being taught at the theological faculties of the so-called 'special universities', viz. the (Calvinistic) Free University of Amsterdam (1880) and the Catholic University of Nijmegen (1923). These were erected by associations affiliated to churches which did not want to see their students being educated by the state. Because of the *simplex ordo*-structure of the theological faculties at these universities, the philosophy of religion had a less firm place in the curriculum. Nevertheless, in Nijmegen it has been part of an official teaching post at the theological faculty from its beginning in 1923; the Free University has a chair for philosophy of religion since 1959.

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[16] Otto J. de Jong, 'De wetgever van 1876 en de theologie', *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 48 (1968), 313-332; Interestingly, philosopher of religion G.E. Meuleman endorses the view of J.H. Gunning jr. that the Act, being the result of a compromise, does not explicitly state that the reshaped faculties should be based on the principle of free research rather than on confessional/revelational premises; according to him, *de jure* it remains possible for those appointed at the faculties to do their work from a specifically Christian perspective. See his *De Godgeleerdheid volgens de Wet op het Hoger Onderwijs van 1876* (Amsterdam 1982), 20. R. van den Broek, 'Het goed recht van een faculteit der Godgeleerdheid aan de openbare universiteit', in: F.G.M. Broeyer & T. van Willigenburg (eds.), *Facultas Theologica: Soror sororum!* (Utrecht 1994), 13-32, rejects this point of view.

In 1960 a new Act on Academic Education intended to strengthen the coherence of the different academic disciplines taught at the state universities, and therefore laid down that the philosophical aspects of each discipline should be studied in a 'central inter-faculty', to which also the study of philosophy as such was delegated. Some theological faculties protested against the eventual transfer of philosophy of religion into these inter-faculties, arguing that philosophy of religion was a genuinely theological discipline. When in 1963 the act was given concrete form in an Academic Statute, the government decided to appoint the professors in the philosophy of religion both at the theological faculty and at the central inter-faculty, rather than to move them to the latter. In this way a 'Streit der Fakultäten' was avoided. Since, at the state universities philosophy of religion can be studied along both academic lines, and is also part of the curriculum of philosophical faculties.[17] In 1964 the Free University decided to follow the example of the state universities in this respect. *Nijmegen ook, misschien al eerder !*

Apart from the public and special universities, theology is also taught at an academic level by a number of 'commissioned institutions'. These institutions were established seminaries or schools for the ministry/priesthood of different churches. Nowadays, they are entitled to call themselves universities even though most of them don't teach any other subject than theology. As to the Catholic ones, philosophy of religion is usually part of the broader philosophical training which underlies the classical theological education. As to the protestant ones, I do not know of any professional work in the philosophy of religion being done there.

Let us now try to map the landscape of Dutch philosophy of religion in a more or less systematic way by looking at the respective universities were philosophy of religion is being taught, starting with the eldest and ending with the youngest. In this way, it may be possible to describe briefly some local traditions. In doing this for reasons of space I shall have to skip many interesting work which has been and is being done, and concentrate especially on how philosophy of religion is conceived of and exercised methodologically.

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[17] J.A. Oosterbaan, 'Wijsbegeerte van de godsdienst', in: W.F. Dankbaar & M. de Jonge (red.), *Inleiding tot de theologische studie* (Groningen 1965), 164f.

2) *Local traditions*[18]: In *Leiden*, philosophers of religion have understood the genitive case in 'philosophy of religion' primarily as an objective genitive. That is, in Leiden one tends to see philosophy of religion as a critical arbiter in relation to religion, rationally assessing what can and especially what cannot be believed with intellectual integrity. This critical tradition in philosophy of religion is deeply embedded in what has been the general atmosphere at the theological faculty for many centuries. Since 1876, the chair of philosophy of religion has successively been occupied by J.H. Scholten (1877-1881), L.W.E. Rauwenhoff (1881-1889), J.H. Gunning (1889-1891), C.P. Tiele (1891-1899), W.B. Kristensen (1900-1915), K.H. Roessingh (1916-1925), H.T. de Graaf (1926-1930), L.J. van Holk (1931-1963), H.J. Heering (1964-1978) and H.J. Adriaanse (1978-). The last three of these professors belong(ed) to the Remonstrant brotherhood, ~~and have been teaching simultaneously at the Remonstrant seminary which had moved from Amsterdam to Leiden before~~. Rauwenhoff wrote the first Dutch introduction to the philosophy of religion; his death prevented him from finishing its second part, but its first part, consisting of two volumes, received international recognition and influence.[19] Rauwenhoff explicitly distinguished the task of philosophy of religion from that of dogmatics. The latter task he saw as describing and justifying the belief claims of one particular religion. The task of the philosopher of religion, on the other hand, was to explain the psychological functions of religion-in-general and to determine its value by means of a rational and moral judgment.[20]

Interesting is the story of Gunning and Tiele. Appointed in 1889, Gunning tried to elaborate a philosophy of religion which was based on the faith of the church community ('het geloof der gemeente'). In doing this, however, he run into so much difficulties, that in 1891 he proposed an

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[18] In writing this section, I have profited from the three earlier comparative studies of Dutch philosophy of religion which I have been able to find: A. Peperzak, 'Godsdienstfilosofie in Nederland', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 32 (1978), 48-69; Henk van Luyk, 'Vormen van godsdienstfilosofie', *Bijdragen* 39 (1978), 350-398; H.J. Adriaanse, 'Godsdienstwijsgerig onderzoek in Nederland 1980-1990: Een overzicht', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 44 (1990), 308-331. Especially the latter essay offers an excellent survey, in which the author gives fair and illuminating characterizations of widely divergent varieties of philosophy of religion in the Netherlands.

[19] L.W.E. Rauwenhoff, *Wijsbegeerte van den godsdienst* (Leiden 1887).

[20] 'De waardebepaling moet ontleend worden aan het redelijk en zedelijk oordeel'; Rauwenhoff, *Wijsbegeerte*, 5. Cf. H. van Oyen, 'Wijsbegeerte der religie', in: H. van Oyen (ed.), *Inleiding tot de theologische studie* (Groningen 1946), 177.

exchange of disciplines with his colleague Tiele. Tiele, who was a specialist in the history of religions, agreed, and thus Gunning came to teach the history of the doctrine of God. Roessingh was the first one to teach philosophy of religion as a separate subject, rather than connected with religious studies.[21] Both he and his successor De Graaf practised philosophy of religion in combination with a strong theological and especially christological interest. At the end of Roessingh's (short) career, the influence of Karl Barth became more and more manifest. In general the Leiden climate became somewhat more friendly to the traditional church theology. The consequences of this development we still find in the work of Heering, who assigns an apologetic task to the philosophy of religion. Although he thinks that philosophy, based on natural and autonomous reason, is unable to produce knowledge of God, he nevertheless argues that the philosophy of religion, rather than accepting the hypothesis 'God' as a presupposition, should attempt to affirm it as a conclusion.[22] In order to do this the philosopher of religion should suspend the own prejudices and interpret the meaning of religious data and interpretations of reality as objectively as possible.[23]

Adriaanse, however, although also influenced by Barth[24] and continuing the more or less phenomenological method of Heering[25], seems most of all to revert to the views of Rauwenhoff. The 'rational and moral judgment' has become a 'general truth-consciousness'[26], but it still functions as an external arbiter determining what can and especially what cannot be

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[21] In 1915 he was appointed as a lecturer for the philosophy of religion, a year later as a professor in philosophy of religion and ethics; cf. H.J. Heering, 'In memoriam L.J. van Holk', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 36 (1982), 145; I thank dr. Marcel Sarot for bringing this note to my attention.

[22] 'Het is aan de godsdienstwijsbegeerte de hypothese "God" niet als onomstotelijke vooronderstelling te aanvaarden, maar haar zo mogelijk als conclusie te bevestigen'; H.J. Heering, *Inleiding tot de godsdienstwijsbegeerte* (Meppel 1976), 126; cf.165-179, and Peperzak, 'Godsdienstfilosofie', 63ff. It should be added that Heering subsequently utters his reservations about the term 'hypothesis', which he considers as one-sidedly theoretical, downplaying the existential and practical elements in (the philosophy of) religion.

[23] Heering, *Inleiding*, 77, 82, 128; cf. Van Luyk, 'Vormen', 360f.

[24] Cf. e.g. his 'Rezeption und Zukunft der Theologie Barths in religionsphilosophischer Sicht', *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 11 (1995), 247-262.

[25] H.J. Adriaanse, *Zu den Sachen selbst: Versuch einer Konfrontation der Theologie Karl Barths mit der phänomenologischen Philosophie Edmund Husserls* ('s Gravenhage 1974).

[26] H.J. Adriaanse, 'Met God zonder "God"?', in: H.M. Vroom (ed.), *De God van de filosofen en de God van de Bijbel* (Zoetermeer 1991), 98.

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believed with integrity. In his latest book[27], Adriaanse argues that as a result the plausibility of the beliefs of Christianity has collapsed. There is no natural knowledge of God, since God is beyond the reach of human reason. And any appeal to revelation as a source of knowledge of God should be treated with suspicion and critical distance. The philosophy of religion is the critical substitute for the traditional *locus de Deo*. Any philosopher who exchanges this attitude of critical distance for one of commitment, is a bad philosopher. Theologians, on the other hand, may be existentially involved in their discipline, if only they refrain from claims to *Wissenschaftlichkeit*. Only a non-cognitivist, non-realist interpretation of religion can avoid the severe criticism of Adriaanse's post-Kantian philosophy of religion. In the end, it seems that Adriaanse's criticisms are inspired by an implicit neo-positivist epistemology the historicity of which is neglected; in any case, the recent shift towards post-modern epistemologies is not assimilated or responded to at all.[28]

Some pupils of Adriaanse have analyzed important examples of religion criticism in continental philosophy. Their conclusions are that speaking about God can only be intelligible if it is done 'in pianissimo', articulating the 'absolute difference' between God and our human conceptualities[29]; and that theology can only be *wissenschaftlich* if it is conceived as religious studies.[30]

In *Groningen* the chair of philosophy of religion was held by G.H. Lamers (1877-1883), I. van Dijk (1883-1917), A.J. de Sopper (1918-1922), W.J. Aalders (1923-1942), H. van Oyen (1942-1947), H. de Vos (1948-1966), H.G. Hubbeling (1967-1986) and R. Veldhuis (1990). Since the chair was combined with one of ethics, some of its holders concentrated on ethics rather than on the philosophy of religion. Van Oyen is a case in point here. He was involved in the philosophy of religion only during a few years of

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[27] H.J. Adriaanse, *Vom Christentum aus: Aufsätze und Vorträge zur Religionsphilosophie* (Kampen 1995); the title is deliberately ambiguous, suggesting both 'starting from Christianity' and 'moving away from Christianity'.

[28] Cf. H.J. Adriaanse, H.A. Krop & L. Leertouwer, *Het verschijnsel theologie* (Meppel 1987).

[29] Hent de Vries, *Theologie in pianissimo & Zwischen Rationalität und Dekonstruktion: Die Aktualität der Denkfiguren Adornos und Levinas* (Kampen 1989).

[30] Arie L. Molendijk, *Aus dem Dunkle ins Helle: Wissenschaft und Theologie im Denken von Heinrich Scholz* (Amsterdam 1991), 339.

his academic career. In 1947, he went to teach ethics in Bazel, where in 1964 he took the initiative for the foundation of the *Societas Ethica*.[31] Nevertheless, Van Oyen had a distinctive view on the nature and tasks of philosophy of religion. He saw the genitive case as a subjective genitive, and over against Rauwenhoff conceived the discipline as a distinctively theological one. He even argued that it has 'a warmly pastoral character', since it addresses questions concerning the relation between faith and reason which many lay people ask. Rather than fideistically urging people to believe what they do not understand, it helps them to reflect systematically on the questions which Christian belief raises in its encounter with modern culture. Especially, the relation between faith and knowledge is of central importance for the philosophy of religion.[32]

Both this critical rationalist approach (to use present-day terminology[33]) and this emphasis on epistemology have become characteristic of the Groningen tradition in philosophy of religion since the Second World War. As to Harmen de Vos, they are visible e.g. in his descriptive study of the classical arguments for the existence of God.[34] A prolific and lucid author who, apart from many other introductions in branches of (the history of) philosophy and ethics, wrote two introductions in the philosophy of religion.[35] He sees it as the primary task of the philosophy of religion to determine the essence of religion and to evaluate its truth-claims (which belong to its essence). In order to fulfil these tasks adequately, philosophers of religion themselves have to be religious, and to subscribe to the truth-claims of religion. 'Faith is asked for'![36] An important value of the phil-

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[31] Jan Veenhof, *Geist und Liebe: Die systematischen Voraussetzungen der Ethik Hendrik van Oyens* (Amsterdam 1978), 20.

[32] Van Oyen, 'Wijsbegeerte der religie', in: H. van Oyen (ed.), *Inleiding tot de theologische studie* (Groningen 1946), 172-188, esp. 173. Interestingly, Van Oyen rejects an apologetic understanding of the task of philosophy of religion, arguing in an anti-foundationalist way that faith is no more in need of rational justification than love is.

[33] I take critical rationalism as a middle way between fideism and strong rationalism. In this way it is defined and defended in the introduction to the philosophy of religion which is used in Groningen's introductory courses at this moment: M. Peterson e.a., *Reason and Religious Belief* (Oxford 1991), 41-44.

[34] H. de Vos, *De bewijzen voor Gods bestaan: Een systematisch-historische studie* (Groningen 1971).

[35] H. de Vos, *Inleiding tot de wijsbegeerte van de godsdienst*, Assen 1937; de Vos, *Wijsbegeerte van de godsdienst* (Den Haag 1950).

[36] De Vos, *Wijsbegeerte van den godsdienst*, 24f.; De Vos leaves implicit what is clear from the context, viz. that by 'religion' he means the Christian religion.

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osophy of religion consists in its contribution to the apologetic task of theology, not in vindicating religion before reason or in proving its truth, but in rationally defending and explaining the Christian faith by searching for traces of its truth both in reality and in the faith itself.

De Vos' description of philosophy of religion as the study of the essence and the truth-claims of religion is found too in his successor Huib G. Hubbeling's presentation of it as 'science of religion + the investigation of truth or falsity'.[37] Like De Vos, Hubbeling combined great philosophical skills with a distinctive theological interest. But in contrast to De Vos, Hubbeling also developed his views by means of a very specific method for doing philosophy of religion, viz. his so-called logical-reconstructivist method.[38] In this method Hubbeling arranges different logical systems according to their strictness. The stricter the system, the less axioms and types of experiential data are allowed. Ethical intuition, aesthetical and religious experience e.g. are only allowed as valid premises in less strict systems. Hubbeling combined this meta-language of logical-empirical systems with a method of interpretation, which led him to reconstruct defective or ambiguous arguments of historical philosophers by tracing and adapting their premises, thus making these arguments as strong as possible. In this way, he logically reconstructed both the ontological arguments of Anselm, Spinoza and Hartshorne and Kierkegaard's argument in *Philosophiske Smuler* (1844).[39] Hubbeling's preoccupation with epistemology, criteria for verification etc. was fuelled by his appreciation and reception of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy.[40] By applying his method of logical reconstructivism to the classical arguments for the existence of God,

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[37] H.G. Hubbeling, *Principles of the Philosophy of Religion* (Assen 1987), 3.

[38] H.G. Hubbeling, *Language, Logic and Criterion. A Defence of Non-positivistic Logical Empiricism* (Amsterdam 1971); cf. Andy F. Sanders, 'Huib Hubbelings logisch reconstructivisme en de Nederlandse godsdienstwijsbegeerte', in: A. van der Jagt & H.A. Krop (eds.), *Filosofie in Groningen 1914-1990* (Groningen 1996). For Hubbeling's bibliography, which includes 11 books and 120 articles, see R. Veldhuis, A.F. Sanders & H.J. Siebrand (eds.), *Belief in God and Intellectual Honesty* (Assen 1990), 185-195.

[39] Hubbeling, *Principles*, 88-103, 217-219.

[40] Hubbeling was not, however, the first Dutch philosopher of religion who recognized the enormous importance of analytical philosophy for theology and philosophy of religion. This was Wim F. Zuurdeeg, who taught analytical philosophy in Chicago until his death in 1963. Cf. W.F. Zuurdeeg, 'Wat kan de analytische filosofie voor de godsdienstphilosophie betekenen?', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 10 (1955-56), 252-263; Zuurdeeg, *An Analytical Philosophy of Religion* (New York 1958).

Hubbeling contributed to the rehabilitation of these arguments in present-day Anglo-Saxon philosophy (by Plantinga, Hartshorne, Malcolm and others).

At present, the Groningen tradition of research in religious epistemology is continued by the senior lecturer Andy F. Sanders[41], who wrote a dissertation on Michael Polanyi's post-critical epistemology. In this study Sanders applies *post-modern epistemological insights to the philosophy of religion*.[42]

Moving to *Utrecht*[43], the chair for philosophy of religion here was successively held by J.J. van Oosterzee (1877-1883), G.H. Lamers (who came from Groningen; 1883-1903), H. Visscher (1903-1931), J. Severijn (1931-1953), A.E. Loen (1955-1966) and V. Brümmer (1967-). As a result of a reshuffle following the new Act of 1877, van Oosterzee was given the task to teach philosophy of religion among other things, but in fact continued to teach his old subjects (especially biblical and practical theology). Lamers taught the philosophy of religion in combination with the history of religions and (since 1884) ethics. The appointment of Hugo Visscher as his successor was politically motivated (he was a pupil of Abraham Kuyper, by then Home Secretary). He as well as his successor Severijn, both orthodox calvinists, were highly involved in state and church politics and wrote little which could be counted as philosophy of religion.[44]

Loen, on the other hand, was a real academic philosopher. Already in his dissertation he developed what would become his main thesis, viz. that the way in which we approach philosophical questions depends in the end upon

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[41] Hubbeling's successor Veldhuis has deliberately limited himself to the ethics-part of his chair. Moreover, a second lecturership for philosophy of religion beside Sanders at the faculty seems to have been abandoned.

[42] Andy F. Sanders, *Michael F. Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology* (Amsterdam 1988); cf. esp. 247-264.

[43] I thank dr. A. de Groot for his bibliographical help in finding information on the history of academic philosophy of religion in the Netherlands in general and in Utrecht in particular.

[44] H. Visscher, *Geen theodicee* (Utrecht 1910), in which he argues that there is such a large epistemic distance between God and us, that we can in no way assess his government of the world by means of a theodicy; J. Severijn, *Principia: Wijsgerige inleiding in de godsdienstwetenschap* (Utrecht 1938). Cf. on Visscher, the dissertation of B.J. Wiegeraad, *Hugo Visscher*, Leiden 1991 (which hardly mentions his responsibility for the philosophy of religion!).

our religious beliefs. In Loen's six books and some forty articles, he elaborated this thesis in various ways.[45] His main work, *De Vaste Grond*, explores the implications of the belief in the creative Word of God as the ground of all existence, being and knowing for fundamental questions in anthropology, ontology and epistemology (or 'gnoseology' as he called it). Loen rejected the doctrine of analogy, and argued that only the divine revelation can be the source of (philosophical) truth. It is clear that he conceived the genitive case in 'philosophy of religion' as a subjective genitive. Far from being religion's antagonist, philosophy can only fulfil its task in service of religion, grounding every domain, every academic discipline in the Word of God. Theology is the only discipline which is excluded from philosophical reflection, since all philosophy starts from a theological apprehension of the divine Word. Apart from the Barthian tendencies which are manifest here, Loen was also influenced by the existentialist philosophy current in his time. Nevertheless, he was widely recognized as one of the most original and thorough-going Dutch philosophers of his time. In part as a result of his rather dense style of writing he had few followers, most of them in South-Africa.

It would be exaggerated to see Vincent Brümmer as one of these followers, but certainly Brümmer came to the Netherlands in order to write his dissertation with Loen. Loen offered him the right combination of nearness and distance to determine his position with regard to Herman Dooyeweerd's Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea, which was very influential in South-Africa at the time. But Loen, being an independent and systematic thinker himself, urged Brümmer to go beyond a critical description of Dooyeweerd's thinking, and to develop new philosophical insights of his own in the second half of the dissertation. Brümmer succeeded to cope with this task, but in doing this he realized that what he needed was a more extensive philosophical apparatus, a method of *doing* philosophy (rather than constructing 'a philosophy') which could be applied to many different contexts. This apparatus he found in British analytical philosophy, to which he was introduced by Ian Ramsey with whom he studied in Oxford in 1961.[46] Thus, in his influential handbook on 'philosophy for theolo-

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[45] See on Loen, K. Doevendans, *Inleiding tot het denken van A.E. Loen* (Assen 1989).

[46] Cf. Vincent Brümmer, 'Kronkels in mijn denkweg', in: Gijsbert van den Brink, Luco J. van den Brom & Marcel Sarot (eds.), *Wijsgerige theologie in beweging* (Utrecht 1992), 11, 13f.

gians'[47] he worked out his method of conceptual analysis and applied it *the*
to areas of axiology, epistemology and ontology. Later on, he applied it to
more inherently theological themes such as prayer, the personhood of God
and the love of God.[48] *has been*

In this way, philosophy of religion was practised in Utrecht as philo-
sophical theology. As in Loen, philosophy of religion is not theology's
antagonist but its ally - though at times a *critical* ally. The philosophical
method of conceptual analysis is used to elucidate the presuppositions and
implications of religious belief claims. It is definitely *not* used to ground
or prove those religious beliefs; in this way, Brümmer's enterprise is non-
foundationalist and (in a sense) post-modern in character.[49] Recently Brüm-
mer adds a hermeneutical accent to this analytical one. He argues that it is
also an important task of philosophical theology to elaborate innovative
conceptual proposals with regard to the belief contents of the faith, in
constant dialogue both with the past and with the demands of our own
time.

Some of Brümmer's pupils have applied his method of conceptual analy-
sis in other areas, especially in the doctrine of God. Antonie Vos (senior
lecturer in systematic theology in Utrecht) was the first of these with his
dissertation on divine knowledge and the contingency of the world. He was
followed by Luco J. van den Brom (now professor in systematic theology
in Groningen), Gerrit Immink (now professor in practical theology in U-
trecht), Marcel Sarot and Gijsbert van den Brink (both lecturers in philos-
ophy of religion in Utrecht), with studies on respectively the doctrines of
divine omnipresence, simplicity, (im)passibility and omnipotence.[50] In
coming years a new research programme will be developed in which the
method of conceptual analysis will be applied to a new field, namely that

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[47] *Wijsgerige begripsanalyse*, Kampen 1975, 1995[4]; translated into English as *Theology and Philosophical Inquiry*, London 1981.

[48] *What are we Doing when we Pray?* (London 1984), *Speaking of a Personal God* (Cambridge 1992), *The Model of Love* (Cambridge 1993).

[49] For a more detailed description of the method of philosophical theology which has been used in Utrecht, see the paper I wrote together with Marcel Sarot, 'De nieuwere wijsgerige theologie' in G. van den Brink & Marcel Sarot (eds.), *Hoe is uw Naam? Opstellen over de eigenschappen van God* (Kampen 1995), 7-32.

[50] See Vos, *Kennis en Noodzakelijkheid* (Kampen 1981), van den Brom, *Divine Presence in the World* (Kampen 1993), Immink, *Divine Simplicity* (Kampen 1987), Sarot, *God, Passibility and Corporeality* (Kampen 1992), van den Brink, *Almighty God* (Kampen 1993).

of identity and change in religious traditions. This does not mean, however, that the Utrecht research on the doctrine of God will be discontinued.

Philosophy of religion has been taught in *Amsterdam* by S. Hoekstra (1867-1892), I.J. de Bussy (1892), H.J. Groenewegen (1916), A.H. de Hartog (1931), N.J. Westendorp Boerma (1939), W. Leendertz (1945)[51], J.A. Oosterbaan (1954-1978) and A.F. de Jong (1980-1991). In 1991 the chair was abolished in a reorganisation of the faculty, and philosophy of religion is now taught by a senior lecturer, Victor Kal. Most of the people in this list were Mennonites. There is a historical link between the faculty and the Mennonites since 1892, when the Mennonites together with the Lutherans prevented the faculty from being closed by the local authorities, by each putting forward two candidate-professors from their faculty-allied Amsterdam seminaries. One of the two Mennonite professors was De Bussy, who was an ethicist more than a philosopher of religion, and apart from De Hartog and Westendorp Boerma his successors have been Mennonite as well.[52] Few of them, however, concentrated on the philosophy of religion. De Hartog was famous for his apologetic gifts, which he developed in confrontation with modern atheism; he devised an all-embracing metaphysical theology, in which he downplayed the particularities of Christianity and took his starting point in the doctrine of analogy.[53]

J.A. Oosterbaan concluded from the fact that since 1963 philosophy of religion was taught not only in the philosophical but also in the theological faculties, that nothing was wrong with taking 'religion' not only as the subject but also as the object of philosophy of religion. Thus, the philosophy of religion can be seen as that part of systematic theology, which attempts to conceptually expound its contents as clearly as possible. Instead of elaborating this conception into a distinctive method (as we saw was done in Utrecht), Oosterbaan goes on to combine both views of philosophy of religion by defining the discipline as 'the totality of the dialogue between philosophy and religion or faith', in which both relate critically to

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[51] Cf. F. Sassen, *Wijsgeerig leven in Nederland in de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam 1947[2]), 140.

[52] I am indebted to prof. A.F. de Jong for his kind information on the history of his former chair.

[53] A.J. Rasker, *De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk vanaf 1795* (Kampen 1986[3]), 250f.

each other, so that philosophy can become religious and theology philosophical.[54]

In accordance with this definition, the Amsterdam way of doing philosophy of religion is characterized by dialogues with different modern continental philosophers on the nature of religious belief and the status of its truth claims. In these dialogues, Leendertz concentrated on Kierkegaard, Oosterbaan on Hegel, his successor De Jong on Heidegger[55] and to a lesser extent on Althusser and Levinas.

In *Nijmegen* philosophy of religion has been taught in combination with the science of religion by J.P. Steffes (1923-1927), K.L. Bellon (1928-1957), E.J.M.J.H. Cornélis (1958-1980) and W. Dupré (1980-). Steffes and Cornélis were primarily scientists of religion; Bellon and Dupré, both prolific writers, developed both parts of their chair. Bellon ascribed a twofold task to the philosophy of religion: it has to study the causes or factors which have prompted and fostered the religious life of humanity, and it has with the help of metaphysics to make judgments on the truth and value of concrete religious beliefs and attitudes.[56] A convinced thomist, Bellon distinguished between theology as the supranatural science of religion and comparative religious studies as the natural science of religion. The latter should lay the basis for the former, by establishing the origin and spread of the idea of God throughout concrete religions. In contrast to his protestant counterpart G. van der Leeuw, Bellon defined religion rather narrowly, insisting that a personal relation with a personal godhead is always present in religion. Where we encounter religion, we also encounter the insight that our reality is not grounded in itself, but depends upon a higher reality which is of a personal nature. Although nothing is proved by this, it so neatly points towards a divine primeval revelation that reductionist accounts of religion can be safely rejected.[57]

Cornélis' studies of religion were much less inspired by apologetical motives. Rather, Cornélis inquired into concrete religions such as buddhism

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[54] J.A. Oosterbaan, 'Wijsbegeerte van de godsdienst', 166f.

[55] A.F. de Jong, *Een wijsbegeerte van het woord: Een godsdienstwijsgerige studie over de taalbeschouwing van Martin Heidegger* (Amsterdam 1966).

[56] K.L. Bellon, *Godsdienstwijsbegeerte* (Nijmegen 1934), 128; cf. the definitions of De Vos and Hubbeling. Both Groningen and Nijmegen have strong traditions in religious studies.

[57] See on the philosophical significance of Bellon, Struyker Boudier, *Op zoek naar zijn en zin*, 197-202.

and hinduism in order to compare their intentions as objectively as possible with those of Christianity. In his latest work, he even tends towards a synthesis of buddhist and Christian anthropology.[58]

Dupré combines Cornélis' open attitude towards concrete religions with Bellon's strenuous philosophical search for what religion really is. The latter search is the central theme of Dupré's introduction to the philosophy of religion.[59] To the philosophy of religion belong the many different kinds of general questions which can be raised with regard to the nature of religion, the science of religion and the relations between religion and philosophy. For Dupré, one thing is absolutely clear: religion cannot be abstracted from culture. Therefore, Dupré asks for a 'culture-ontological' analysis of 'the religion that there is' (to use his Hegelian terminology). The philosopher of religion must try to stand in between the different cultures and compare the 'patterns of meaning' which are unfolded in different religious traditions.[60] Dupré does not want to make a choice in the dilemma of whether this work has to be done 'from the inside' or 'from the outside'. Rather, since human beings are necessarily religious (!), we necessarily share both the insider and the outsider perspective.[61] Although he is not particularly clear on this, it seems that Dupré pleads for some kind of interaction between the two in the philosophical study of religion. In his latest book, Dupré also discusses the contribution of religious studies to the promotion of inter-cultural inter-religious dialogues. Earlier he wrote about religion in primitive cultures, and published a dissertation and a number of articles on the thought of Nicholas of Cusa, whose works he and his wife edited in a three volume Latin-German edition.

The founder of Amsterdam's *Free University*, Abraham Kuyper, considered the philosophy of religion as a distinctly non-theological, philosophical discipline which nevertheless could be of help for theology. Its task is to describe the essence of religion, to reflect upon its connections with other phenomena which have a place in the human consciousness, and 'to get to

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[58] Cf. Struyker Boudier, *De dominicanen* (Wijsgerig leven II) (Nijmegen 1986), 123.

[59] *Einführung in die Religionsphilosophie* (Stuttgart 1985); cf. on this book Adriaanse's survey, 'Godsdienstwijsgerig onderzoek', 318, 325f.

[60] W. Dupré, *Patterns of Meaning* (Kampen 1994).

[61] Dupré, 'Tussen binnen en buiten', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 34 (1984), 229; in this article, Dupré explains his views on the nature and tasks of the philosophy of religion (although unfortunately in a rather dense and difficult style).

know the history of religion in the light of its *idea*'[62]. This is not a neutral enterprise; the difference between true and false religion cannot be ignored, and the Christian believer should do philosophy of religion from a Christian perspective. Despite this ~~marginal~~ role which Kuyper gave the philosophy of religion in the theological faculty, in practice biblical and dogmatic theology had such a central place that hardly any philosophical work was being done.[63]

This situation changed when G.E. Meuleman was appointed in 1959 at the newly erected chair for philosophy of religion. It is hardly surprising that we find in his work an on-going reflection upon encyclopedic issues like the nature of theology, the relations between natural theology, philosophy and apologetics etc. Like his Amsterdam colleague Oosterbaan, Meuleman defined the philosophy of religion as the place where theology should communicate with philosophy. He himself conducted this dialogue in his publications on e.g. Blondel, Pascal, Schleiermacher and process thought. Both theology and philosophy make their truth claims, and it is important to relate these to each other. In line with Kuyper, Meuleman argued that in doing this the philosophy of religion as it is exercised in a theological setting should recognize the authority of the biblical revelation.[64]

Whether Meuleman's successor H.M. Vroom would still subscribe to this view is not so clear from his publications. The main emphasis in his research is on inter-religious dialogue. The nature of his many contributions in this field can perhaps best be described as 'comparative philosophy of religion'. In an extensive study which has been translated into English[65] Vroom compares the different concepts of truth as they function in the five world religions. He treats Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic thought with great respect, and tries to develop a hermeneutical sensitivity to much more existential notions of truth than our Western one. At the same time, he argues that there is much overlap between the different religious traditions.

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[62] A. Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid* III (Kampen 1909²), 277vv.

[63] Cf. J. Klapwijk, 'Honderd jaar filosofie aan de Vrije Universiteit', in: M. van Os & W.J. Wierenga (eds.), *Wetenschap en rekenschap 1880-1980*, Kampen 1980, 528-593, esp. 578f.; cf. on Kuyper 532-542, on his counterpart H. Bavinck 546-551.

[64] G.E. Meuleman, 'De wijsbegeerte van de godsdienst in de theologische faculteit', *Rondom het Woord* 16 (1974), 96.

[65] H.M. Vroom, *Religions and the Truth: Philosophical Reflections and Perspectives* (Grand Rapids 1989).

In a more recent second volume on the theme of 'religions and the truth', Vroom inquires into the reasons why a person who has read extensively on other religions would continue to be a Christian. In the course of this book he elaborates an inclusivist position in the theology of religions.[66] In his latest book Vroom argues that religious traditions will continue to play a central role in the structuring of our present-day pluralist society. Liberal and pragmatic philosophers should not overlook this fact. We will need the Christian religion next to others as 'the soul of Europe'.[67] From a similar perspective, Wessel Stoker, part-time lecturer in philosophy of religion next to Vroom, has recently compared secular responses to the human quest for meaning in life with the Christian view of life.[68]

As in Belgium, a large number of philosophers in the Netherlands who are not officially or specifically involved in the philosophy of religion, have nevertheless made many important and influential contributions to the field. I would like to end this survey by briefly referring to some of them.

From the Catholic side, Ad Peperzak, who has been a professor for philosophy at five different universities, H.H. Berger (Tilburg) and most recently Ludwig Heyde (Nijmegen) have approached the philosophy of religion from the point of view of metaphysics, relating the essence of religion to the human quest for meaning.[69] Bergers accent on metaphysics is continued in Tilburg by his successor B. Vedder, whereas in Utrecht P.H.A.I. Jonkers is connecting religion and philosophy from a similar perspective. Henk van Luyk (Amsterdam), on the other hand, opted for the point of view of ideological criticism. From the protestant side, Theo de Boer aroused much discussion with a specific revitalization of the Harnack-thesis. De Boer argues, that the 'small story' of the original gospel of the humility of God in Christ has been suppressed by the onto-theological

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[66] H.M. Vroom, *No other Gods: Christian Belief in Dialogue with Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids 1996).

[67] H.M. Vroom, *Religie als ziel van de cultuur* (Kampen 1996).

[68] W. Stoker, *Is vragen naar zin vragen naar God?* (Zoetermeer 1993).

[69] H.H. Berger, *Vragen naar zin: Een nieuwe inleiding in de metafysiek* (Tilburg 1986); Ad Peperzak, *Zoeken naar zin: Proeven van wijsbegeerte* (Kampen 1990), see esp. 80-106 for his view on the task of philosophy of religion. Ludwig Heyde, *Het gewicht van de eindigheid* (Meppel 1996). On Berger and Heyde, see Struyker Boudier, *Op zoek*, resp. 323-332, 440-442; on Peperzak: Struyker Boudier, *In Godsnaam* (Wijsgerig leven III) (Nijmegen n.y.), 131-141.

tradition, and that the predominance of the God of the philosophers over the God of Pascal is the main cause of Western secularization.[70] Willem B. Drees of the Free University's 'Bezinningscentrum' is the most important (though not uncontroversial) writer on the relations between science and religion. In his latest book, he defends a bluntly naturalist position on the theme.[71] René van Woudenberg tries to reach a breakthrough from the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea in which he was trained at the Free University's philosophy department, and which tended to become a philosophical world in its own, both towards the North-American movement in philosophy of religion known as 'Reformed epistemology' and towards the Utrecht way of doing philosophical theology; in his recent work he finds himself inspired by philosophers like Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff (who held a part-time chair at the Free University's philosophical faculty from 1985-1991) and Vincent Brümmer.[72]

3) *Concluding remarks*: The complex academic situation of philosophy of religion at Dutch universities is mirrored in its methodological and material diversity. Up to the middle of the eighties the situation was in many cases not so much that mutually exclusive answers were given to philosophical questions with regard to religion, but that totally different questions were being asked and answered. To a large extent there was no common field of debate, and theories which were expounded were highly incommensurable. Nowadays, the government is exerting more and more pressure on the different faculties to cooperate in research and post-graduate teaching. As a result, philosophers of religion meet each other regularly and have to explain the relevance of their own methods and manners to each other. It seems to be the case that this is bringing about a rise in mutual understanding. At least not all philosophers of religion from different backgrounds continue to behave like ships passing in the night. Thus for example com-

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[70] Theo de Boer, *De God van de filosofen en de God van Pascal* (Zoetermeer 1989), 1995³; cf. the collection of responses in H.M. Vroom (ed.), *De God van de filosofen en de God van de Bijbel.*

[71] Willem B. Drees, *Religion, Science and Naturalism* (Cambridge 1995).

[72] René van Woudenberg, *Gelovend denken* (Amsterdam 1992).

munication between the Leiden- and the Utrecht-tradition in philosophy of religion has improved considerably.[73]

It seems to me that the methodological diversity in Dutch philosophy of religion is at least partially due to three factors. First, since the Netherlands lies at the crossroads of the three culturally leading countries of Western Europe, philosophical influences from Germany, France and the U.K. were incorporated in different degrees and proportions. Second, the Netherlands has not produced any central figure in the philosophy of religion whose genius was so uniquely impressive, that everyone had to relate to him or her (either positively or negatively). In this regard, the situation differs from that in Denmark (Sören Kierkegaard) and Sweden (Anders Nygren).[74] Third, Dutch philosophy of religion has a strong systematic inclination. Many individual philosophers of religion have written their own introduction to the discipline in which they elaborate their own solutions to their self-proclaimed problems, rather than building on the work of their colleagues and predecessors. Interesting examples of this procedure we found in the work of H. de Vos, A.E. Loen, H.J. Heering, V. Brümmer, H.G. Hubbeling and W. Dupré.[75] Sometimes the best one can find in terms of inter-academic dialogue is a short appendix with references to work which is being done by others in the field.[76]

One might wonder whether this individualism is responsible for the lack of school-formation in the field. The work of quite a number of philosophers of religion seems to have become forgotten after their death. A

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[73] Cf. H.J. Adriaanse, 'Four reasons to become nervous and two possible remedies', in: G. van den Brink, L.J. van den Brom & M. Sarot (eds.), *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology* (Kampen 1993), 1-21. This article on the work of Vincent Brümmer, shows both disagreement and also a common field of debate.

[74] Cf. Svend Andersen, 'Philosophy of Religion in Denmark', in: Andersen (ed.), *Traditional Theism and its Modern Alternatives* (Aarhus 1994), 204ff.; Anders Jeffner, 'Philosophy of Religion in Sweden and Finland: A Survey', Andersen (ed.), *Traditional Theism*, 216ff.

[75] De Vos, *Inleiding*; De Vos, *Wijsbegeerte van de godsdienst*; Loen, *Inleiding tot de wijsbegeerte* (Den Haag 1947); Brümmer, *Wijsgerige begripsanalyse*; Heering, *Inleiding*; Hubbeling, *Denkend geloven: Inleiding tot de wijsbegeerte van de godsdienst* (Assen 1976; a revised edition was published in German: *Einführung in die Religionsphilosophie*, Göttingen 1981); Dupré, *Einführung in die Religionsphilosophie*.

[76] E.g. Brümmer, *Begripsanalyse*, 290-292; Hubbeling, *Denkend geloven*, 133-140. The most extreme example of this is no doubt to be found in the work of Loen. Loen once confessed that the positions which he analyzed and criticized in his work were most often not historical examples at all, but conceptual possibilities which he had constructed himself. See Brümmer, 'Kronkels in mijn denkweg', 12.

usual procedure was that newly appointed philosophers of religion started to pay some tribute to the qualities of their predecessors' work, and subsequently choose their own way, retaining at most a few isolated insights from their predecessors. Arguably, they could hardly be blamed for this, since they were not provided with a coherent methodological framework within which a certain type of research could be continued and elaborated. It just was not clear how to do philosophy of religion apart from developing your own private philosophy. So however brilliant their predecessors work may have been, it didn't prove fertile.

I think it can be said without bias, that Vincent Brümmer has been the first who succeeded in realizing an important breakthrough in this regard. His application of the philosophical method of conceptual analysis to the field of systematic theology proved remarkably fruitful, inspiring a number of younger scholars and engendering much type-like research.[77] In recent years, this research-group has become internationally known as the 'Utrecht school of philosophical theology'. Since in our present-day academic setting we can no longer afford to have individual scholars who work out their individual programmes, we may hope that this trend of common methodological orientation and substantial co-operation will become dominant in the future in other branches of Dutch philosophy of religion as well. The foundation of a Dutch society for the philosophy of religion in 1995 (*Nederlandse Vereniging voor Godsdienstwijsbegeerte*, based in Groningen), in which also Belgian philosophers participate, is a hopeful sign in this respect.

Let me end with a final personal observation. In his survey of ten years philosophy of religion in the Netherlands, Adriaanse distinguishes between eight different topics of research (God, the world, the soul, religion, theology, culture, language, and historical issues).[78] This division mirrors the diversity of research in Dutch philosophy of religion. Nevertheless, it is clear already from Adriaanse's survey that there is much overlap between these different research themes. This is the case, I would suggest, because in the end all these themes have their centre in one single theme which continues to form the core of any research in the philosophy of religion, viz. God. Of all the studies mentioned above, however widely diverse and

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[77] A collection with seven samples of this type of research is in Van den Brink & Sarot (eds.), *Hoe is uw Naam?*.
[78] Adriaanse, 'Godsdienstwijsgerig onderzoek', 315-331.

divergent they are, there is not one which does not either directly or indirectly deal with God in his relations to the world and to human beings. If the soul, culture, language, theology etc. are studied in the philosophy of religion, it in the end always turns out to be with one question in mind: what is said and can be said about God from this particular perspective? God, in other words, is, has been and no doubt ever will be the sole theme really worth pondering about in the philosophy of religion.