
Kruyswijk’s study focuses on controversies about evolution and the authority of the Bible, as they occurred among Reformed theologians and scientists in the Netherlands. He begins in the early years of the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (GKN) in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, with Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck as the towering figures among the theologians. Reformed medical doctors and a few natural scientists organized themselves in a Christian society. The second part of this study, “consolidation,” considers the development in the Interbellum. With the increasing emancipation of the gereformeerden and in 1930 the founding of a faculty of natural sciences at the ‘Vrije Universiteit’ in Amsterdam, the number of scientists increased—but they were still outnumbered by the theologians, say as 1:10 by 1940 (p. 123). The third part, titled “the great reversal,” discusses the greater role of the scientists since the 1950s, numerical and substantial, and major shifts in the understanding of Scripture. The author, born in 1939, is rooted in this tradition. By first degree he is a cardiologist, with a doctorate in medicine. After retirement he studied history, and dedicated himself to this project, which earned him a second doctorate at Leiden University.

The main thesis is that though initially the theologians determined the reception of evolution, in later years the acceptance of evolutionary theory determined the theological development. Thus, in the initial section, the vision of A. Kuyper and H. Bavinck on evolution and religion is presented as based on their understanding of the formal authority of the Bible as the sole foundation of genuine religion. Not that all passages of Scripture need to be taken historical, but those that are presented as such should not be taken as symbolic or mythical when challenged. Though the Almighty God might have created by evolution, that is not how it has happened. The organized Reformed medical doctors and scientists in that period followed the opinion of the theologians. In their journal, they rejected various elements of evolutionary theory, while at the same time valuing observational and empirical science.

In the period from 1920 to the 1950s, the ‘orthodox’ position within the Reformed Churches was further entrenched. A famous controversy regarded the question whether the snake in paradise had really spoken. In 1926 the Synod of the Reformed Churches, meeting in Assen, decided that this was the orthodox position. Kruyswijk shows that this battle against J.G. Geelkerken and his allies was not only about the authority of Scripture; the outcome consolidated also
the dominance of orthodox theologians within the Reformed Churches. A few scientists intervened on behalf of Geelkerken, but in the theological and ecclesial context their contributions had no impact on the Synod. In a subsequent study group (1926–1930) the scientists felt that the theologians totally failed to address the scientific issues and treated the scientists disrespectfully. The decisions of the Synod did have repercussions for the scientists in the Reformed Churches, keeping some highly qualified persons such as the biologist J.P. de Gaay Fortman and the astronomer W.J.A. Schouten from employment at the faculty of natural sciences at the Vrije Universiteit (established in 1930). Though the theologians were still in control within the Reformed Churches, the scientists did enter the field with new insights and a different understanding of knowledge.

In the period after World War II the Reformed Churches opened to the world. Internally, the rise of a more modern attitude took somewhat longer. Kruyswijk argues that with an increased presence of scientists in the Reformed Churches, there was a drive towards greater acceptance of mainline scientific insights, e.g. the old age of the earth (the topic of a major conference in 1950). Most important has been J. Lever, a biologist at the Vrije Universiteit who since the mid-1950s promoted the acceptance of evolution in the Reformed Churches. In this sense, the scientists were in the lead. Not that they were able to convince the dominant theologians, but numerically they had grown and they did reach out successfully to a wider public within the Churches. Some theologians followed, and in the 1960s and 1970s they took the lead in developing a more modern, historical-critical understanding of the Bible and a less doctrinal form of theology that accepted insights from the sciences. Though this did lead to some controversy within the Churches, and attempts to end the discussion with decisions by the Synod, the authoritarian approach of 1926 was not carried through anymore. The discussions resulted in recurrent disputes over the authority of Scripture, culminating in 1981 in the report God met ons (God with us). The truth of Scripture was understood to be ‘relational,’ depending on the acceptance by the hearer, rather than ‘objective.’ Rather than a single view, a plurality of positions on Scripture now became accepted within the Reformed Churches.

Kruyswijk has written an informative study, focusing on theologians and scientists in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The author’s main thesis is that the scientists were driving the developments. The increasing acceptance of historical scholarship, including a historical-critical study of the Bible, and the successful social and academic emancipation of the gereformeerden were relevant as well. Even though some scientists have been important, one might interpret his account as well as showing that the controversy was one between different